

THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF  
AN INTRODUCTORY LEVEL  
THEOLOGY OF WORK CURRICULUM:  
THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE AT WORK

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For Rebecca, Katie and Jonathan  
who have taught me much  
about my calling as a Husband and Father;

With gratitude to my friends and fellow leaders  
in the congregation of Redeemer Presbyterian Church  
who have loved me well and made room for my education and service;

And to our Lord.  
May He receive glory through this work  
and may those in His kingdom be enriched as a result.

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## **ABSTRACT**

There is a growing body of literature in the Theology of Work. This literature is important because work is not just something we put up with while here on this earth, but more fundamentally it is of great importance to God. There are significant gaps in this literature due to: lack of a common language, lack of critical mass within congregations, fragmentation of workplace and religious institutions, institutional pride, underlying theological hurdles, and lack of practically oriented resources. We have researched, establish and field tested a theologically rich, practical, introductory level work and faith integration curriculum to bridge these gaps.

## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

There is a growing body of literature and resources in the Theology of Work movement. Much of the content of this literature underscores the importance of being faithful to God in our daily life as we grow in Christ's calling to serve him in all things – our work, and even in the absence of work. Some of this content has been successful in breaking down the false understandings in western thinking where dichotomies have developed between the sacred and secular, spiritual and physical at both the application level and at the level of Biblical and Systematic Theology. This false divide has been the backdrop for much of both Catholic and Protestant thinking in the theological perspective on work since the days of Constantine. (We'll dig into the roots of this false divide later in this chapter, so that we can think about additional ways to dig ourselves out into a better understanding).

This body of literature is of critical importance, because our work is not just something we put up with while here on this earth, but more fundamentally it is of great importance to God; and if we want to move beyond 'surviving' our work, or if we have used work as a form of idolatry that is consuming us, connecting faith and work becomes a critical component of a wholistic understanding of life. A healthy view and understanding of work helps us maintain a corollary healthy participation in our workplaces. Because work itself is also one of the primary mechanisms by which Christ transforms and sanctifies us; it is of tremendous value for us to understand his purposes in work - by doing so we understand his care for us and the world, how and why he is partnering with us to change the world to become his kingdom, and how he

will ultimately include us in the glorification of himself and the ongoing redemption and reconciliation of the cosmos. Some of this growing body of literature about work is very specific regarding the context of that work (e.g. business, government, home) and some gets specific about the theological nature of different types of roles within the workplace (e.g. leadership, law, policy making, decision making, homemaking). This literature forms a foundation for what the work of a Christian ‘should’ look like and is very helpful for individuals in those particular institutional and role contexts.

But there are also significant gaps in this literature. Within the theological spectrum of work in all its forms (paid and unpaid) the wisdom and ethics of the Bible are currently experiencing a resurgent welcome by Christians who are active within the business sector, and many titles are being written. Some of this resurgence can be attributed to the western cultural reality that the home has been classified as a ‘private’ sphere, alongside the church and even privately held corporations, where religious freedom and belief is not just tolerated but often welcomed. Our culture’s understanding of pluralism tolerates and encourages a wide variety of views within any institutional sphere that is viewed as personal or private. Similarly, the ethics of belief have historically been welcomed and can be easily integrated into home life where faith is held up as significantly relevant, and relationally simple in comparison to larger more relationally complex spheres. However, at the other end of the institutional spectrum - within the spheres of the government and the secular/public academy - Christian thought and those who would proclaim allegiance to Christ can sometimes meet with a greater amount of hostility or marginalization if they promote alternatives to the belief

structure of secularism (the view that God is irrelevant to daily life and work). This is due to the nature of these public spheres which have philosophically assumed and valued a highly neutral and isolated stance (e.g. prohibiting prayer at public gatherings, Christians being blackballed from tenure or even obtaining serious interviews for professorships because of assumptions about faith as a motivation in secular-humanistic learning environments) not warranted inherently by the sphere itself.

Every institutional sphere should be viewed in an organic way. Every sphere needs to have an internal coherence, values and vision for the realm in which they serve as experts and stewards. Every sphere must have appropriate institutional boundaries, in order to know the extent of their expertise and ability. But, every sphere must understand their existence in the mutually beneficial context of other spheres, and also be porous enough to welcome interaction with, philosophical challenges from and ‘sharpening’ by every other sphere. With this understanding, every institutional realm (set of common institutions) holds a common underlying purpose – to serve and spur the flourishing of humanity and to encourage the love and care of individuals in community.

There are a variety of factors for the hostility found in different spheres towards religious belief (especially Christian belief). Some of the hostility can be related to the historic reality that some Christians have been abusive, sloppy or triumphal in their stewardship of Christian values and claims when working within other institutional realms. The beliefs, constructs, values and assumptions of the enlightenment are

sometimes held as the overarching reality within institutions that have antagonistic stances towards other ‘religions’, such that even a private religious faith can be seen as antiquated, backwards or threateningly anti-natural and therefore anti-institutional. Such a strongly held humanist and anti-spiritual ‘religious’ agenda is not necessarily warranted by the sphere. Within the enlightenment model, truth and ethics are held to be a relative or situational paradigm, and as such those who would claim to have competing models or singular truth(s), can sometimes be viewed as narrow-minded or threatening even without being offered the opportunity for a significant amount of philosophical defense or discussion. Especially in the more ‘public’ institutional spheres, belief is only allowed (if allowed at all) when it has been suppressed (and caveated) into a private realm, and thus a continuing sacred/secular dichotomy is held or develops, especially for participants in these institutional realms if they desire to follow Christ.

Every institution (and therefore every workplace) which humans participate in demands some form of loyalty. This institutional loyalty takes many forms - time, finances, allegiance to a code of conduct, relational expectations, etc. Sometimes the spoken (or unspoken) code will include the rejection of other institutional allegiances. When the rejection of other spheres is demanded, an institution in all probability has reached beyond its proper role or appropriate boundary of influence within society. In the past the institutional church has sometimes been complicit with these inappropriate values. This includes an overstepping of roles as in the case of the commingling of Church and State in the Roman Empire, or overly conservative churches of the deep

South which participated in institutional and cultural racism, oppression and bigotry. In a corollary fashion, parts of the Church have also been guilty of understepping as in the case of the failure of the Protestant Church to take an ethical stance in the face of genocide in Nazi Germany, and many cases where the Church has tolerated, cast a blind eye, or failed to discipline, the public behavior by members out of step with the teachings proclaimed in its worship and witness to the world (e.g. financial and legal/governmental corruption, serial marital infidelity, etc.). Understepping can occur both intentionally (knowing what to do, and not doing it) and unintentionally (failing to grasp the need because a particular church's focus has moved from equipping the saints for works of service in the world to forms of Christian entertainment and shallow discipleship in the name of relevance and outreach).

Because of the Church's lack of a reliable track record (in overstepping and understepping as explained above) and a fragmented ethic of cultural influence, individual Christians, may read about the *theological ideal of work/faith integration* and buy into it, but then have questions about its application. Similarly in the application realm, the Church is not seen as an experienced or valuable institution when sustaining a proper motivation for practically living out faith within a specific workplace context. There are multiple reasons for this including, the lack of interested participants within churches, prevailing cultural norms, lack of theological knowledge and practice, etc. The resulting lack of support structures and collateral educational materials within the institutional church can leave many who desire integration isolated within what they see as a 'lonely' faithful existence within their professional track or

institution. In addition to being isolating, such a lack of support can also be both frustrating and lead to disinterest or apathy, as well as poor judgment and practices within the workplace based on faulty theological constructs held by believers, because the integrity of their beliefs has not been challenged or sharpened as those beliefs are ‘played out’ within other institutional spheres.

As mentioned earlier, much of the theological material within the Theology of Work movement being created has a particular institutional bent (e.g. paid worker, business, medicine, law, home, etc.). While this institutional work is important especially for those who have mastered the basics and desire a deeper application within a specific sphere or field, a corollary problem has developed. The problem is that much of this material is not easily transferrable across a spectrum of institutions or professions. To be effective in its discipleship efforts, the church also needs more foundational and institutionally universal educational materials. The need is to meet participants in the intra or multi-institutional gap, where those who are professionally and institutionally isolated (either relationally or because of a lack of relevant materials) can begin to integrate work and faith in more significant ways. *The educational material that can be created (and should be used by the Church) in its own institutional mandate to equip the saints for works of service must develop both a proper cognitive theological construct as well as a theology of imagination and practice that taps into personal desire and motivation with a realistic expectation of the trials and frustrations experienced in the trenches of the daily life.*

The foundational and universal educational material that is needed must work across the institutional spectrum where believers find themselves as participants or ‘citizens’ – in the realm of home, business, government, education, and even in the Church as a place where work is carried out. The educational material that is needed in the Church should form a thoroughly biblical understanding of work, be robustly applicable and useful by highlighting what it means to work in different fields of practice (e.g. finance, sales, management, customer service) within different institutions, and also what it means to rest (or ‘not-work’) by underscoring a proper motivation for leisure and sabbath. The material should even be broad enough to apply to and help understand periods of unemployment and underemployment. There is always a need and room for specific biblical, ethical and theological work to be done in specific institutional spheres, especially as we think about those who have become isolated and even fearful as they try to live out faith in the more humanist dominated institutions and the antagonistic secular spheres mentioned earlier. However, much of this practical and institutionally specific content needs to be deliberately connected and foundationally developed through a common philosophical language, a common systematic theology and a common pedagogy within the Theology of Work movement. A common understanding of what it means to overcome of the sacred/secular divide as an underlying problem within every institution and profession is of critical importance.

At the most introductory level, a foundational curriculum needs to deliberately develop common values and vision so that Christians in disparate institutions and professions can in turn help one another (as interested and growing believers) to be

united in both language and practice as they navigate and sometimes prophetically resist the ways that their respective institution want to shape them into a particular mold or institutionally ‘bent’ image. A foundational and universal curriculum would also need to create commonly held language and practices that can stand up to the different nuances and often self-serving perspectives of a specific professional area or institution while upholding the values and ideas that can undergird all institutions and professions when we think of the biblical, ethical and theological dimensions of how Christians approach their work (which here again, would include the realms of paid and unpaid work as well as the also the ‘anti-work’ topics of leisure and Sabbath as being important to the study of ‘work’). After this universal pedagogical work and theological language has been developed, there is also much room to build on the foundational work and delve into more specialist oriented curriculum and material (which although not the focus of this project, is in desperate need of development in some of the institutional realms mentioned earlier, where Christians do in fact find themselves isolated and fearful).

Let’s look at an application of this broad abstract problem by developing a specific institutional example. This example helps illustrate the underlying problems that many workers face in being faithful to two institutions simultaneously. The institution of the Church and the institution of business are two spheres that are beginning to see and experience a healthy resurgence of interaction and thoughtful exchange. Both of these institutions ask for a type of loyalty or allegiance in order to participate in the unique benefits that they offer. In order to operate as model participants or ‘institutional

citizens' both these institutional spheres ask those who participate to hold to a set of common core values or a unifying vision of reality that each institution might have for the lives of its participants or members (as that institution understands good citizenship). So for the Christian businessperson (the Christian who stewards their gifts within and is called to the field of business) who desires integrity in life, 'citizenships' must be held simultaneously (and ideally without conflict) in a single person

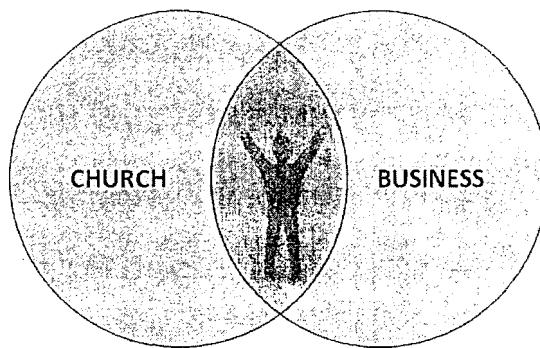


FIGURE 1: Fully Integrated Citizenship

When operating properly and smoothly, both institutions welcome this mutual citizenship, and know that the 'dual' citizen desires growth in the ability that they have to inform and shape each institutional sphere from within their own appropriate position of influence and responsibility. The Church has things to say and can wholeheartedly affirm the value of business, while proclaiming the danger of mammon. The Church can encourage the work of 'good' and ethical business citizens from a Christian perspective (which should be welcomed in ethically and conscientiously run businesses). Businesspeople have experience and wisdom for the ongoing operation, expanding role, and continued growth of the Church and religious institutions in the

world (this is within churches that welcome the wisdom of someone in the business community). In addition churches are able to fulfill their mission of discipleship and equipping the saints for works of service in the world, when businesspersons are encouraged and able to promote a spiritual and thoroughly Christian motivation for human flourishing in the institutional realm of business. The influential and mutual give and take between these two particular and exemplary spheres happens because of its mutual citizens and the citizens that care and take time to develop an understanding of these mutual interfaces. When this understanding works well mutual citizens flourish and both institutions thrive.

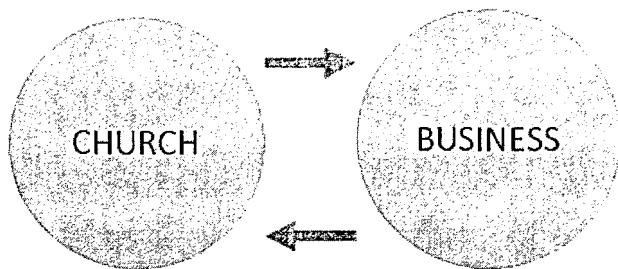


Figure 2: Church Sphere and Business Sphere Interacting

When the exchange and reality of dual citizenship is seen and realized, ‘integration’ types of questions are naturally asked such as “how do I navigate” the tensions and implicit demands that occur when seemingly contradictory motivations or values within both institutions arise? (Note again that in the example above we have used business as the specific institutional sphere but could also easily replace the business institution with any sphere – government, education, arts, healthcare, etc.).

Let's move beyond our specific example of the business institution, and imagine how these questions of tension, conflict and integrity can begin to take many forms:

- *How can I be a \_\_\_\_\_ (business person, government employee, teacher, artist, doctor, etc.) with \_\_\_\_\_ (profitability, financial, shareholder, owner, management, union, stakeholder, etc.) expectations, and also care about people and their personal development and flourishing?*
- *What are some common spiritual disciplines and integrated, thoughtful theological constructs that I need (a believer's reflexes and lifting muscles) to help me as a believer, navigate "citizenship" in \_\_\_\_\_ (business, government, academia, etc.) as an institution?*
- *As a believer how do I stay above the fray of an 'everyone out for themselves' \_\_\_\_\_ (business, academic, political, legal, healthcare, etc.) environment?*
- *What does it mean to live with faith in the work context that I have been given? How are my motivations, actions and behaviors different from my work peers? What should the source of those differences be?*
- *Are there any areas of work (deals, specific professional positions) that I should avoid because of my faith and this particular business institution's stance on ethics within my particular professional area of practice?*
- *When is it appropriate to talk about my faith to others in my workplace without offending or taking advantage of either the freedom or power structure I've been entrusted with?*

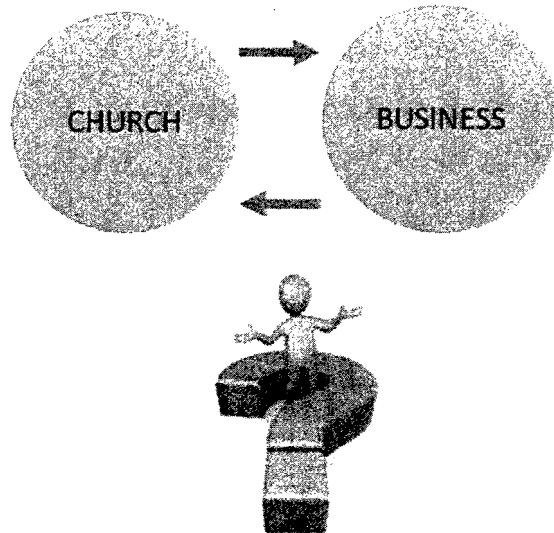


Figure 3: Questions about Sphere Interaction

When encountering questions of integrity and areas of tension or conflict like those listed above, mutual participants face a choice of allegiances. Out of the tension two options develop:

- Either the expectations or circumstantial nuances need to be reshaped so that the demands no longer compete with one another, with the integrity of the dual citizen/mutual participant intact.

OR

- The dual citizen/mutual participant develops a dis-integrated motivation, split personality or double minded practice where the two institutions shape him into a private/public, sacred/secular or institution #1/institution #2 realms.

For those of us who care about developing personal and institutional integrity as well as cultivating others to become fully integrated participants and citizens, when helping others in the continued development of morality and integrity, it is not enough merely to know what things should look like. As mentioned earlier, there is also a very real need to address the subterranean world of motivation and imagination, as well as the more visible realm of practices and disciplines that develop as we live out the gap between ‘what is’ and ‘what could be’ in the context of the workplace. In other words, we need to know what to do and also willingly embrace doing it.

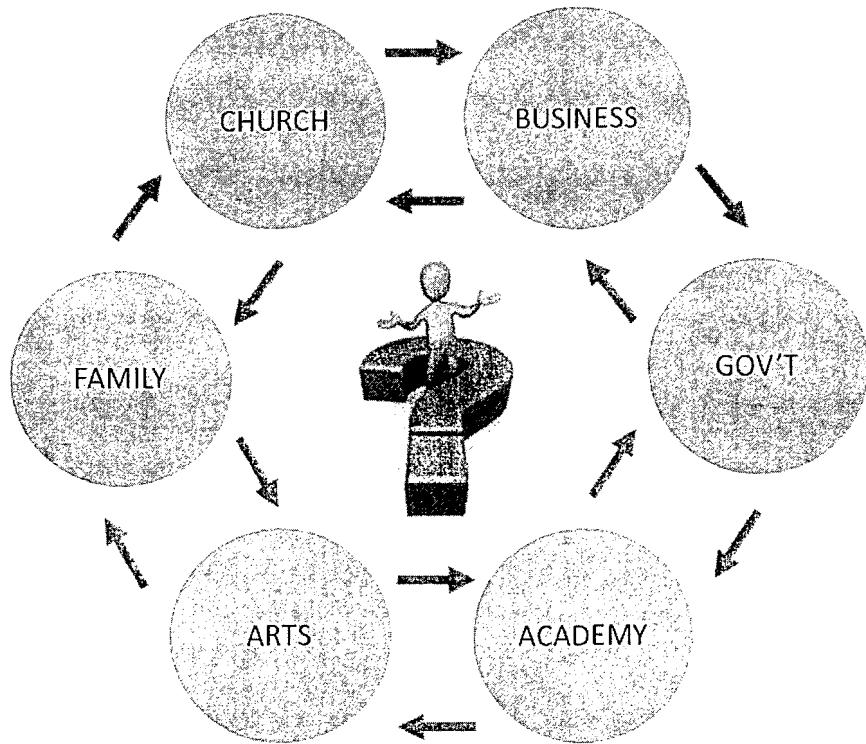


Figure 4: Institutional Sphere Complexity

At the same time we must also must acknowledge that the simple example of the interactions of church and business spheres is only a microcosm of a much greater reality. There is also a much bigger institutional tug of war occurring in the lives of citizens and participants within every sphere of life. We find ourselves working alongside or in exchanges with several institutions all at the same time. It is not just the pulling and tugging of church and business, but also the potential shaping (and potential competition for dominance) of every sphere over every other sphere - each competing for our loyalty and also their potential sovereignty when it comes to our personal ethics. Not only do church and business promote allegiance, but there are other significant places where Christians find themselves at work and in their particular vocations, either aligned with, working for, managing, running or overseeing institutions. Perhaps they

will find themselves as citizens, participants or consumers that value the goods, services or ideas that these other institutions represent. Each sphere rubs up against and impacts every other sphere, which as we shall see is both a dilemma and an opportunity for us as believers.

Everyone should be asking similar questions within their respective spheres of vocation - how do I live as a properly motivated and integrated person in - Government, the Academy, the Arts, and the Home, etc.<sup>1</sup> Which practices, motivations and thought patterns should I resist, which ones should I embrace, and which ones should I actively oppose? Every Christian who finds themselves at work in the institutional church or parachurch realm has problems with personal relationships in their workplace, the institutional use of finances and issues of morality and justice among personnel. No institutional sphere is immune from the questions and significant dilemma of dual citizenship.

A large part of the problem within the institutional church is the historic reality that the Church has often been under attack and focused on its own survival as a relevant institution. Competitive forces among church denominational ‘brands’ and assaults on the very idea of faith from an intolerant enlightened secularism have fragmented the Church and in many scenarios have turned the focus of some churches inward. For example, today in the twenty first century, the smallest of churches are focused on surviving physically - keeping the doors open, the lights on, and repairing leaky roofs.

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<sup>1</sup> This listing and corresponding illustration is not meant to be an exacting or comprehensive list of institutions, but is meant to be exemplary only. For instance in Abraham Kuyper’s scheme of sphere sovereignty, agriculture was at one time a significant sphere that has been assumed today by the larger category of business. Institutions are and can be representatively fluid over time, especially as they become mechanized and commoditized.

At the other end of the size spectrum, the largest of churches, are making contradictory, yet analogous pushes for the institutional church to become the center of life - by sustaining and growing robust programmatic ministries and creating alternative cultural institutions rather than encouraging robust and relevant culture shaping through encouraging member involvement in other spheres. A third problem is churches that develop internally oriented programming and resources that solely promote internal ministerial involvement, but either omit or fail to take seriously the work of believers in the world for the sake of flourishing, mission and outreach beyond conversions. This happens both in churches that omit outreach and focus internally only, as well as in churches that promote outreach solely among religious professionals such as pastors, evangelists and missionaries and ask laity to only give financially to such 'religious professional' endeavors.

Some churches see it as part of their mission to create and support separate but parallel religious institutional realities, rather than reform or speak into existing cultural institutions - such as the singular promotion of religiously "safe" commercial, educational, and entertainment institution and establishments and even religiously endorsed governmental candidates - all of which are possibilities in our era. By promoting a singular 'alternative' path some churches may be missing opportunities that believers have to be salt and light by participating in other institutions, rather than creating parallel structures or co-opting other institutions for their benefit. Some of the largest churches have food courts, schools, church parking and security ministries, and are spread out over multiple campuses. The pietistic impulse for a purer and 'God-

pleasing' institutional forms may be a good and laudable desire. If so, how should we also feel about those who work and labor in their 'secular' counterparts. Are such workers and institutions second class, or does God call people to work in the institutions of a figurative 'Babylon' as well as those found in the corresponding figurative 'Jerusalem'? How can we empower and support individuals who often feel isolated within a specific institutional entity - be it a company, professional practice, school, or home - by linking them to others who are struggling to integrate work and faith in many of the same ways. We need to encourage believers to occupy every sphere of society for God's glory, and help equip them for the unique challenges they find there (e.g. Christian school, public school and even home school teacher needs to be equipped well and encouraged to see God ordained paths to serve in their particular context).

Just as the sun dwarfs, defines and orders the planets in our solar system, what is needed is a central unifying set of principles, language, worldview or metamodel of life in the kingdom of God. This model should both orient those who want to see their society flourish for the sake of the gospel, and yet give room and offer affirmation for outsiders who hold to alternative explanations as part of what it means to live a life of exile. As already shown, such a model needs to be both theological and practical, as well as capable of inspiring the imagination to explain what is, but also what could, can and should be.

In seeking out ideas that can help us create an integrative understanding of ‘ground rules’ for how the various spheres of life should interact the framework of Abraham Kuyper can be a helpful undergirding construct when we think about the need for such a metamodel. Kuyper lived in post-world war I Belgium where the divided Catholic, Reformed Protestant and Agnostic Humanist segments of society needed to coexist and flourish - much like that of Old Testament Babylon, where the post exilic Jewish minority was encouraged to settle down and be a blessing to their unbelieving neighbors. Kuyper was the first to propose the idea of sphere sovereignty - a concept that upholds each sector of life with its own distinct responsibility as well as authority or competence. As an academic and politician, he encouraged each of these multiple spheres (Catholic, Humanist and Protestant) to stand independently and equivalently in status to all the other spheres of life. Each taking their respective places in the cosmos of a modern society. The philosophical foundation of sphere sovereignty as held by Kuyper is Biblical theism - the view that God is active in and through human history. Sphere sovereignty relies on the idea that an all-encompassing created order was designed by and is governed by God. That created order includes societal sectors and communities that have been formed around unique philosophical constructs, concepts and ‘visions’ for education, worship, civil justice, agriculture, economy and labor, marriage and family, beauty, etc. The principles of sphere sovereignty seek to define and respect concrete boundaries between the unique spheres, while acknowledging that every sphere falls under the sovereignty of God himself, with no one human institution trumping or ruling any of the others, yet also encouraging the spheres to humbly and civilly sharpen and engage one another in their common cause of human flourishing.

While sphere sovereignty proposes a relative independence within a sphere, because each sphere has an inherent particular language and integrity to uphold, this does not necessarily mean that the spheres operate with complete freedom. As mentioned earlier, the concept of institutional spheres must also be viewed in an organic way. Every sphere has its own internal coherence, values and vision for the realm in which they serve as experts and stewards. Every sphere must also recognize appropriate institutional boundaries, and critical interfaces with other spheres in order to know the extent of their expertise and ability, and who they effect in their decision making. But larger than the context of a specific sphere, every sphere must also understand their existence in the even broader mutually beneficial context of other spheres, and also be porous enough to welcome interaction with, philosophical challenges from and ‘sharpening’ by every other sphere. Every institutional realm must therefore hold to a sometimes forgotten but common underlying purpose – to serve and spur the flourishing of humanity and to encourage the love and care of every individuals within a community of institutional spheres.

The diversity of spheres as originally proposed by Kuyper, in the context of post World War II Belgium, where differences were beginning to be appreciated and valued, followed after the Old Testament diversity of ‘kinds’ found in the Genesis account of creation, where God created, valued and called each thing after its own ‘kind.’ In much of Old Testament literature we see cautiousness against the reproduction between kinds, because without diversity we lose the inherent value and uniqueness that each kind

represents, and may in fact create a commonality or blandness that cannot stand the test of time or which will lead to its eventual downfall. We see this principle in the importance of biodiversity in the natural world, where homogeneity can make a population be more susceptible to disease and/or extinction. Often maintaining a diversity of kinds can help create a type of shalom among humanity and the created order, where no individual will or should dominate, when they in humility look to how they can serve the common good from within their own sphere rather than to serve themselves and conquer all spheres to rule in pride, selfishness or arrogance.

When considering the typological realities of ‘kinds’ today in our current context, where diversity and independence are held as their own universal truths, in addition to weighing and consider these prohibitions and warnings of kinds in the Old Testament, we must also consider the implications of freedom in the New Testament, where we see the lifting of the dietary laws, because of the considerations and freedoms we find in the gospel. The importance of the relative freedom and flourishing of all kinds must be the recognized backdrop, as we consider the application of kinds found in Kuyper’s proposal for spheres today. The underlying ‘kind’ warnings are put there for our benefit and must be treated as a typology where the warnings should be acknowledged and appreciated – it is healthy to acknowledge boundaries and purposes for differing institutions – but know that kinds must mix, interact and even experience conflict in such a way that the health and benefit of all the institutions is upheld. We must also be aware that a theology of kinds can also be abused - as it has been in the past - to promote

an institutional overreach, dominance, exclusivism or institutional gain at the expense of other institutions.

Take for example, the different norms ordained by God for both family life (the home) and economic life (business and government). The inherent value and independence of both spheres must be recognized - a family does not best function like a business, but also a business is not a family (or a church). While institutions can and should interact with one another, learn from one another, sharpen one another, and welcome receiving sharpening humbly from others outside their realm, different norms, goals, assumptions and values drive each one. Similarly, institutions should never seek and in fact should shy away from sovereign, totalitarian or comprehensive control and regulation of activities outside their respective areas of competence (e.g. as in the past with both church and/or the state). Each should in the more universal realm of all spheres consider and respond to change, critique, and challenge from others.

In history there are many examples of inappropriate institutional overreach that created dangerous circumstances. In the Middle Ages, the Papal System sought broad control over the world through the Catholic Church. During that time period, the Church became the primary patron of the arts, and gave its ascent to military conquest. The politics of the Middle Ages often consisted of political leaders doing what church leaders instructed them to do. In business and agriculture the Catholic Church supervised and vetted community roles and routines. And in the family sphere, the Catholic Church historically spoke into and regulated marriage and sexuality. The

Academy was originally founded by Catholic religious orders and later by denominations. Even if in one sense this sounds wonderful, during this same time period we must recognize that corruption within the Catholic Church was allowed to grow unchecked in many areas, because of the span of control and institutional overreach that they enjoyed.

These abuses left room for the quick adoption of Protestantism in Europe with a number of similar yet varying models of sphere sovereignty creating competing schemes of regulation of varying spheres across the continent. In response to the Catholic corruption, a growing secular worldview was accompanied by the emergence of a wealthy merchant class which grew in influence during the Middle Ages. In turn, merchants became the patrons of the arts, ran governments and endowed universities, independent of the Church. As protests against the abuses of the Catholic Church grew, Protestantism would officially free the civil government, the arts, family, education, and economics from direct control of one another. While Protestantism maintained a full-orbed religious view of life, as did Catholicism, the secular enlightenment sought to escape the influence of religion entirely. Such responses, which fought against the Church and collapsed the Roman Empire, fought Nazi-ism, Communism and even now wage against Consumerism/Westernism, should stand as a great warning to any institutions who would want to regulate and coerce beyond what could be defined as the natural limits, boundaries or constraints of such spheres. Total control or dominance to make a name for one's self rather than serve the common good should be rejected in

favor of responding to nuance, critique and welcoming humble interactions from other spheres.

So with this diversion into the subject of sphere sovereignty we have uncovered some deep roots and now turn to another variety of potential theological corollaries applicable to our current context.

First, let's delve into the theological underpinnings of sphere sovereignty as a philosophy. The institution of the family, for example, does not proceed from the State, the Church, or from parallel social realities, but derives itself from the original creative act of God in the formation of the first humans – Adam and Eve. On their arrival, we see in the opening pages of Genesis that things were complete from God's perspective – full of great potential and very good indeed! The completeness that we find here meant that Adam and Eve were created as imagebearing and imitating partners that wouldn't just sit back and rest, but instead continue the work of creation in relationship and partnership with the ongoing work of the Trinity. Not only do we see the first family here, but also the command to care, tend, and fill imagines other institutions as well. The story of humanity was set in motion - as a perfectly provisioned world - which allowed humankind to participate in the further development of that world. In the Garden, we see the 'seed bed' of several spheres as Adam and Eve were given the resources (the land, plants and animals), commandments (vision and values) and ability (as imagebearers and imitators) to create the tools of industry, to tend to the land for

agriculture, a decision making structure for government and faithfulness to the command to multiply and create the family.

When we consider sphere sovereignty as a philosophy we've already alluded to and recognized the assumption that spheres should exist in tension between independence and cooperatively interacting and not overreach to rule over one another sovereignly.

We can see the biblical underpinnings and applications of this overreach in the story of the tower of Babel. The pride that had developed in ancient Babel became manifest through the Babel-onians desire to make a name for themselves, rather than live in such a way that they would make God's name great and love their neighbors amidst their differences. The Babylonians arrogantly sought a great name and 'world' domination within a singular culture that did not recognize or give gratitude towards God. When humans lack cultural diversity and become strong in authority within a society, they can correspondingly grow in pride and become dangerous in their arrogance and power if they are unwilling to live in service to God or others as his representatives or image-bearers within that society. An example in our current society, is that neither the state nor the church alone can dictate predetermined conclusions to others, without interaction with and proper recognition from and service towards the other spheres (e.g. before teaching about Jesus and Mohammed within a public school setting it would be helpful to interact with leaders within the Christian and Islamic communities before doing so). No sphere alone is representative or should be dominant with its views and understanding. Each must exercise proper humility and relationship among the others it

serves alongside. It means that applicable rules, laws and regulations should only be passed and adopted considering testimony from outside authorities relative to the boundaries of each sphere.

Another example can be drawn from the public school system. The proper administration of schools should and does rest with those who are legitimately appointed or elected to such positions according to their specific competences and skills, but also more importantly they also relate to others who are in outside spheres, but impacted as public stakeholders of that institution. In trade organizations, this means that the governing rules of trade should be developed in conjunction with those represented and knowledgeable outsiders who understand organizational interfaces, rather than be developed by outsiders without any knowledge of trade practices (e.g. When passing trade or labor legislation, governmental authorities would be wise to speak to labor unions and corporation as critical outside stakeholders). Similarly when scientific organizations need to respond to the questions of government regulators and funding corporations, they need to do so in such a way that they welcome transparent interaction with outside organizations, but at the same time do not derive bias in their initiatives because of those interactions (e.g. playing to the lead of government regulators or bending results to the expectations of sponsoring corporations). Instead institutions should develop their findings from the principles developed by experts within their representative field as a result of interactions both internally and externally to their institution.

Healthy institutions always consider how their actions will serve and impact those outside and inside their organization. Much like a sovereign ‘nation-state’ whenever an outside institution (e.g. government or corporation) attempts to overreach and tries to regulate or unethically bend to those outside its knowledge base or sovereignty, without help from knowledgeable outsiders who understand the interfaces of that industry, those serving within the affected institutional sphere should protest the other institution’s (e.g. state’s or corporation’s) very really meddling in their internal affairs.

The sovereign sphere concept representatively places the power of institution shaping largely into the hands of the people within that institution, while acknowledging the need for service to, humility towards, and sharpening by outside spheres and stakeholders. Any institutional authority that exists always has its authority entrusted, derived from that culture as it sits under God, the norms of its people, and other spheres as they exist within that same cultural reality. Given this reality, larger questions then begin to center around how far an institution may act and influence without interfering in the liberty and responsibility of others? What happens when trust is breached and mistakes are made in the name of the common good? What ends must be preserve, if the common good is threatened? What sits at the core, and fights for the common good and values of all? We all do. As it was written to the institutional church in Philippians 2:4 about Jesus’ mindset it these things “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” In a sense, just the like the church in Philippi, institutions, are in one sense communities of trust and the arbiters of

thoughtful constructs that hold people together and inspire them to work for the common good.

So you may be asking “what does all this have to do with work – faith integration?”

Let’s imagine another reality together. It is precisely at this point where we need the power of the gospel. Only in a life transformed and lived for God is there lasting hope for the sustained ability to love neighbor above self. That power is present in community among the people of God when they cry out to him in faith for the Spirit filled ability to tackle the tensions that arise as we are thrust into our daily work contexts. In the church we find people called to a variety of institutional spheres who are called there to serve and love neighbor. They may lead a business, a church, a home, be on the local arts board, be unemployed or bag groceries at the local marketplace. They each have different pressures and demands, but in some ways those pressures and demands have a commonality from which they can learn from one another, support one another and call each other to greater daily faithfulness, because they know Jesus and want to serve their neighbor as he would. Their common need is in part what makes all the difference.

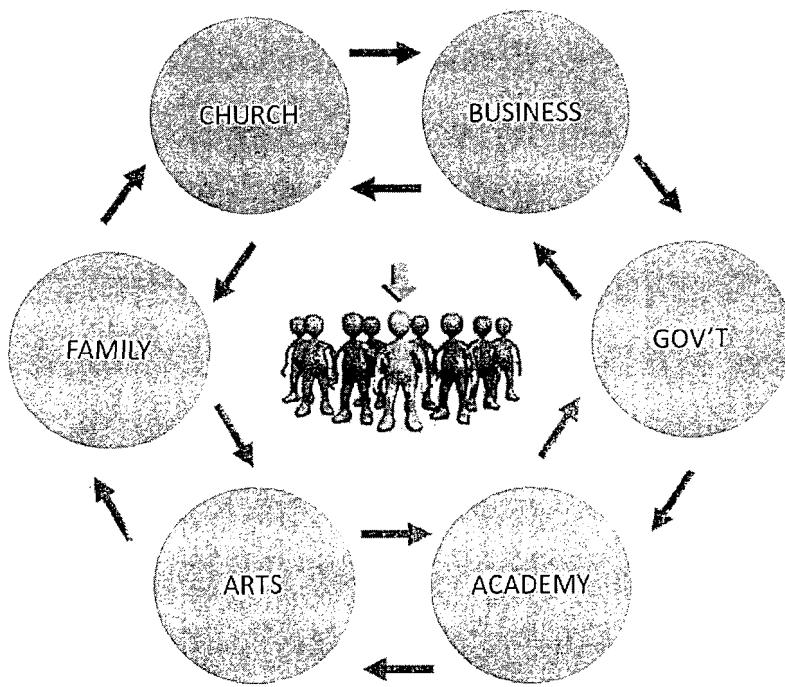


Figure 5: Believers in the Midst of Sphere Complexity

Jesus spoke to his followers of an entity that existed outside of the religious institutions of the day – outside of the Jewish State, the Caesar cult, beyond the laws and taxes of Rome, and independent of the values of mammon in the marketplace. An entity was coming that could keep all the other institutions, nations, people, tongues and tribes aligned within their proper God-given roles. He spoke of the coming kingdom of God, and the kingdom ethic that those who inhabited that non-institutional space should inhabit. It is at the level of God's people who want to serve rather than be served – those who are willing to be persecuted for righteousness, those that sow peace rather than discord, and those who are willing to their enemies. It is here at the level of

the coming kingdom of God where we must shape language, knowledge, imagination and practices. It is at this common core of the kingdom of God where there is true hope for real change, and where we see believers from every other institution (tongue, tribe, nation, government, guild, family and academy) able to come together to mold and shape others in their struggle for faithfulness to their Redeemer. The power for such change rests not in ourselves alone but more importantly in God. It is only in Him that a dialogue of common purpose and communal mission for His name and for His sake, in the humble service of others and their common flourishing alongside of us, can happen and needs to happen in a robust and unique way.

As we begin the review of literature that examines who has done and is doing some of this kingdom work, what they are saying, and where the institutions they are speaking into are located, we need to turn our attention back to better understand the gaps and hurdles that exist for Christians in the common or central kingdom trenches. We need to see and understand the contours, shape and weight of the body that needs to be supported, before we can build and create the content and philosophical backbone necessary to properly and adequately educate this community of believers who exist in various spheres. We call this faith integration knowledge base a ‘Theology of Work’. This theology of work includes not only intellectual assent to a body of knowledge, but also contains the daily practices borne of personal work and faith integration. There are multiple ways that individual Christians feel isolated and are isolated by others in their quest to integrate faith as a primary motivator of daily life outside of the Church. Within the institutions of society (The Family, The Arts, The Academy, Government,

Business and Church, etc.) Christians can become isolated from and miss one another in several different ways:

- They *Lack of a Common Language* (but can gain it by sharpening one another with good materials).
- They *Lack a Critical Mass* of interested individuals (but can seek out and invite others from different spheres to help them in their quest, with the right material that emphasizes a common struggle).
- They succumb to the continued *Fragmentation of Workplace and Religious Institutions* (but do not have to fatalistically sign on to this course of events if those with more experience guide them).
- They inadvertently hold to a form of *Institutional Pride* (which can be broken down in community through a courageous committed small group of people with a different perspective).
- They *Fail to See the Underlying Theological Hurdles* that push us into a sacred/secular divide (but can be shown if they are humble and want to serve God rather than themselves in their daily work).
- They *Lack Faith and Life Integration Resources* (which is the mission before us)!

Let's look at and define these hurdles in greater detail and imagine some ways that they can be overcome through some sort of knowledge base project.

### **A Lack of Common Language**

For those who are examining and speaking into the faith and work movement there has not been a common understanding of the basics of a theology of work and cultural engagement. This however is changing as many are adopting a framework of Creation - Fall - Redemption (where redemption also includes the important category of Glorification as the 'end goal' of the redemption of the cosmos) to think through the big

categories of work and daily life. Relatedly the Creation Mandate, Great Commission and Great Commandment are seen as the big ideas of Scripture that neatly parallel this overall framework. While these knowledge categories are a great start, the hard work begins when ‘the worker’ then begins to apply the philosophical framework to his/her own context. This deeper level of application is where the frustration and fragmentation begins, in part because workers lack the imagination to apply constructs to anything out of their own cultural context, or import the constructs of others into their own circumstances, up and down a ladder of abstraction. What are the ways that the Creation Mandate, Great Commission and Great Commandment should be applied to my workplace, what are the similarities between how they are applied? Is there a broader model that we should consider applying here? How do we use, apply and navigate the languages of individual professions to gain a better understanding of what God is doing in each of our individual callings and spheres of influence. Just as God’s grace shown at the tower of Babel has fragmented human language and cultures to preserve humanity and prevent pride, so we need multiple institutional cultures and aspects of theological nuance to help create a more beautiful mosaic of understanding when it comes to a Theology of Work. Both the common foundation developed when we consider the whole, as well as the deeper aspects developed by various professional and institutional experts matter. The parts and perspectives of others in the church are of vital importance as we consider the subject and the task of creating a universal and foundational theological understanding.

## **A Lack of Critical Mass**

In many workplaces there may be a few people who are interested in what it means to honor God in their work, but for most it can be a fairly lonely existence in a firm, company or practice. Sometimes this is because there are no other true Christ followers, and other times the Christians that are there don't recognize the importance of applying faith to daily life and instead choose to live in ways that conveniently segment the sacred and the secular. I personally have found that Christians who are passionate about work and faith can help and encourage one another across professions and across institutional spheres if they are able to get over initial barriers of unfamiliarity. People from other industry and institutional contexts can always help give us a fresh look at our own circumstances and a hopeful perspective that isn't weighed down by similar circumstances. We can encourage one another to have faith rather than give in to pessimism or negativity. We need more places in church and also parachurch institutions that can connect people cross functionally in significant ways, in order to get to a place where guilds of Christians can be recovered within particular institutions and professions.

## **The Fragmentation of Workplace and Religious Institutions**

Relatedly, the fragmented nature of the workplace and religious institutions is an underlying driver of the kind of isolation that keeps workers from developing a critical-enough mass to encourage one another and drive the cultural change that is one of the end goals of living faithfully as people of God's kingdom. This kind of isolation keeps hyper-specific cultural issues from ever being addressed with a broad spectrum of input

and perspective, so that workers never really gain traction in the application of the gospel and faith within their specific institutional realm which explains some of the lack of faith-work materials in these spheres (computer science, engineering, governmental administration, etc.). There is an urgent need for the Church to look beyond the fears in the tension of keeping the lights on and the roof fixed. The Church is its people and not its physical structures, and leaning into that tension will require churches to do less ministry that builds up activity or ‘entertainment’ centrally outside of a weekend context while at the same time to encouraging amore distributed and decentralized approach to equipping ministry. This decentralized approach should unify Christians across denominational lines in workplace guilds and affinity groups during the week in places where those Christians are, and emphasize the Sabbath worship of the Lord and mastery of Sunday morning as one of the main context where people come uniquely into God’s presence and are changed to face the challenges of the week as his stewards in work. These emphases are needed so that the people of God can impact the world and surrounding culture with their work and relationships the remainder of the week, rather than being brought back into a church’s orbit throughout the work-week. The Church gathered on Sunday must be the Church scattered Monday through Saturday - if it is to grow and impact the world with the gospel. Christian affinity groups, encouragement groups and prayer groups that do happen during the remainder of the week should be encouraged, as well as physically located outside of the walls of the church building - as the ‘Church’ in the world - contextually located within the institutions of the world: the home, the workplace, academia, etc.

## **Institutional Pride**

A parallel problem is the insular effect of personal and institutional pride that can prevent us from reaching out beyond what is known and comfortable. Such a lack of reaching out isolates us in our own circumstances, which can leave believers frustrated and broken. When an institution is siloed, it is naturally kept from change because a lack of outside institutional input leads to significant group-think and blinders. For example the home and the workplace are seen as separate domains, but many of the challenges of spouses that are homebound and those in the workplace are similar, and these two types of workers can identify and learn from one another if given the opportunity to humbly dialogue with someone outside of their immediate context. A second example happens within the educational system. If educators do not humbly keep a pulse on the expectations of other institutions (the home, government, industry etc.) they can become insular and ineffective in their work – to produce students that are being educated in ways contrary to parent's wishes, to educate in ways that governmental stakeholders see as wasteful or ineffective, or graduates that do not serve the needs of industry and therefore are not hired readily. Christians can and should set the pace as humble relational leaders within their work contexts. A final example is to consider the work of the Church in creating disciples that take seriously the work of serving other institutions. Human flourishing will come about as the Church encourages those disciples serve in other institutions, so that there (as well as in the life of the Church) the Lord's will will be done, and the Kingdom will come on earth as it already is in heaven. That work can and will in directly cause conversations about the gospel, cause communities and homes to flourish and even cause churches to flourish

and grow. Finally when considering the Church's flourishing and institutional pride we also must mention the need for the institutional church to grow in its recognition of its members as a faithful presence in other institutions. The church member's work for neighbor in the institutions where God has placed them brings salt and light and promotes godly flourishing in other places in the name of Jesus. Likewise the institutional church needs to grow in its ability to equip and commission the saints for these works of service within those same institutions.

### **Failure to see Underlying Theological and Belief Issues**

The Reformation sparked by Martin Luther's posting of his theses to the Wittenberg church door was a monumental event in the history of western culture. Luther responded appropriately and well to the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church of his day. The legacy of the Reformation he sparked with his response is with us to this day. However there is an unfortunate abuse of Luther's emphases and distinctions that also has crept into the Reformation legacy as well, one that we as his inheritors need also to tackle and re-reform. Let's discuss his reforms as they changed our understanding of vocation. First Luther showed us that the new creation both personally and communally/societally should be the focus of our efforts and our sanctification – this is a good thing. Secondly Luther was also able to set the doctrine of vocation (as well as one of personal righteousness) apart from a doctrine of works that had been taught within the Catholic Church – this is also a very good thing. These two changes came at a cost because they were not well nuanced for what was to come beyond Luther. Luther rightly proclaimed that the heavenly kingdom for every believer focused on that

believer's relationship with God, and that the earthly kingdom (which was passing away) was an opportunity to love neighbor in the name of Christ through every calling.<sup>2</sup>

To this point Luther said "(We) cannot deal with God otherwise than through faith in the Word of his promise. He does not desire works, nor has he need of them; rather we deal with men and with ourselves on the basis of works."<sup>3</sup> For Luther these two kingdoms were not exclusive of one another, but instead represented the main, yet mysteriously integrated tapestry of ways that God worked through and in individuals as well as in the institutions of the world - through his spirit and through his Church.

Unfortunately over time, Luther's two kingdom view morphed into a new two tiered calling system, as it mixed with Anabaptist thought in Europe (Anabaptists called believers to withdraw and separate themselves distinctly from the world). Although Luther himself was not guilty of the abuse (because he emphasized the importance of living faithfully in both kingdoms for every believer) those who followed him in Protestantism misapplied his understanding that both kingdoms existed simultaneously. Instead they returned to the older caricature where sacred or heavenly kingdom callings (e.g. work in the Church) were held above ordinary or 'earthly' callings, because of an un-reformed view of eschatology. This abuse also carried forth a corresponding potential physical/spiritual divide where the things that are seen (earthly) are denigrated and the unseen (heavenly) valued. This resurgent (Anabaptist infused) protestant version of the two kingdom Catholic hierarchy cuts off the possibility of a believer's

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<sup>2</sup> See Lee Hardy, *The Fabric of This World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1990), 46-48 for a greater understanding of Luther's two kingdom view.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), in Luther's Works 36:42.

ordinary work having any long term substantive value in the eternal kingdom of God.

This is also unfortunate.

A better view would be one that sets the two kingdoms firmly in a reformed eschatology - where the new heavens and new earth are united - for heaven and earth to meet and become one through the work Jesus and his people. In such a view the kingdom of heaven merges and refines (rather than destroys) the earthly kingdom. In such a reformed view, God's enemies are destroyed, and the earth is transformed. The new heavens and new earth are an integrated spiritual/physical realm with the resurrected physical yet spiritual Christ as the firstfruits of the coming integrated kingdom.<sup>4</sup> This lack of nuance regarding eschatology that co-opted Luther's original vision of the two kingdoms perpetuates a sacred/secular and physical/spiritual divide, even today with the Reformation as a part of our inherited legacy. We need a symbolic return to Wittenberg, where Luther's two kingdom vision of being 'a'part of the world is important because of the work of Jesus in our lives is fresh and relevant (rather than being called 'apart' from it, in an attempt to make ourselves pure through personal effort and piety).

### **Lack of Faith and Life Integration Resources**

Finally there are a number of difficulties with some of the current work and faith integration resources. First, resources are split in their approach to this problem. They tend to be either systematic or practical, but very few attempt to integrate the systematic

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<sup>4</sup> See Darrell Cosden, *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006) pages 43-45 for a fuller explanation of these theological assumptions and their corresponding applications.

and the practical in a deliberate kind of way. Systematic constructs (or what we would say was ‘head’ knowledge) should be a reinforcing motivator that flows into and from the hearts and hands involved in daily life and work. The applied work should bring up weaknesses and questions that we need to adjust our head knowledge and vice versa.

There are few resources that try to tackle the underlying theological construct of personal piety that drives the sacred/secular divide. As we have already mentioned in considering the abuses of Luther’s two kingdom view where relationship with God is valued over relationship to neighbor. These abuses also lead to an anti-works bent and therefore a corresponding anti-material approach that seeps into Protestant Theology.

Darrell Cosden’s book *The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work*, discussed above, is of particular importance here. His analysis does an exceptional job at both spiritual diagnosis and cure. An anti-works bent is prevalent in Protestantism because of the emphasis on the healthy correction of salvation by faith alone. A healthy and balanced gospel-centered approach will help in clarifying both of these concerns to lift up relationship with God and love of neighbor equally. Several resources tackle the imagination required to correct the conservative evangelical bent to reminisce solely about relationship with God in the garden, rather than moving forward to undertake the work of restoration and love of neighbor required to transform urban life to reflect the reality of the city of God described for us as part of the new heavens and new earth of the book of Revelation.

The end of the world and time as we know it, is here again, not destruction, but a refining where we see God and man participating together in a new united heaven and

earth. The physical earth is assumed, transformed and united with a new and “real” heaven. The constructs imagined in Revelation are ones that are heavily reliant on the creative work we find in the ongoing use of technology (sparkling gems, ordered gardens, dwellings, thrones, etc.) An approach that focuses on the end goal (God’s glory) and means of sanctification (by faith) should be a helpful corrective here as well. There are also no known resources that try to integrate and build bridges between paid and unpaid workers by creating a common language, values and vocabulary that allow people from disparate institutions the ability to speak into one another’s lives as it relates to work and faith integration. Finally there are very few resources that link a life lived in light of the gospel directly to faith and work, and certainly even fewer that try to do so in a way that integrates the practical with the theological.

In order to define, test, and confirm these assumptions and inklings that we had:

- the work – faith integration problem,
- its cultural and philosophical setting, as well as the strengths and weaknesses perceived in both
- the existing church institutional constructs and the
- resources that currently exist

a series of ten subjective one on one interviews were conducted. Five of these interviews were with those who were veterans in fields outside of the institutional church (primarily business but not limited exclusively to business – one lawyer and one doctor). Five additional interviews were conducted with pastors as representative of workers in the institutional church.

The five open ended work-faith integration interviews with individuals (from novice to expert) who were attempting to integrate their faith with the work they do every day, asked the following questions:

- How well do you feel supported by others in your work faith integration efforts?
- Do you know of any helpful materials as it related to work and faith integration?
- Who were some of your role models in this area?
- What were some of the lessons you have learned?
- Would you be willing to articulate your personal work and faith philosophy?
- Do you feel supported by your church in your work?

In 100% of those interviews:

- The interviewees felt that church had not been helpful with their integration.
- Participants felt the theology of work and daily life was underdeveloped.
- Interviewees felt alone in their efforts.
- Those interviewed had a personal philosophy / language where they could articulate a significant portion of work-faith integration in their own words. (But lacked a common language in which to transmit that personal philosophy).

The corresponding series of five interviews with pastors were held to review and discuss the findings from the first set of interviews, as well thoughts that they had on the importance of faith and work integration.

In all 100% of these interviews:

- Pastors agreed that faith and work integration was a critical aspect of discipleship.
- Pastors felt that their experience couldn't correlate to the experience of members in their institutions.
- Pastors felt so busy and overwhelmed with discipline and pastoral care issues that gaining expertise was not a short term option.

- Pastors were open to help from laity to lead in the area of work faith integration to help them gain needed context and expertise as to the tensions and dilemmas that existed for workers.

There were some commonalities in what both workplace veterans and pastors already knew and understood, which could serve as a springboard for content – building off ideas people knew but then also filling in gaps and applications where perceived theological experts felt weak.

Virtually all interviewees felt that ideas expressed in the Creation Mandate, Great Commandment and Great Commission were good jumping off points and undergirding constructs for their understanding of faith and work. Not every veteran got all three of these, but each got at least an aspect of two of these big ideas. There was also a working knowledge of Creation, Fall and Redemption as a working theological grid or construct that can and should relate to these three big ideas. To address these interview findings as they intersected with the faith and work integration gaps we have already articulated, we began to imagine what a theologically rich, practical, introductory level resource might look like as the main product of a significant subjective research endeavor. The research would be oriented towards how the material was received in a variety of audiences and contexts. Was the material both theologically rich, but also practical? Did people find it understandable, usable and quickly applicable to their daily work? Did it speak to a broad spectrum of chosen professions and institutional situations?

The material in a proposed curriculum would need to bridge the stated theological gaps with significant memorable content and be developed and articulated in such a way that it also met and bridged some of the institutional gaps and tendencies towards isolation that existed, yet in way that it could be used inside and outside the Church. Such a curriculum would have as its main purposes, the support of workplace Christians in their spiritual growth and theological understanding of their work and workplaces, as well as the movement toward living out their faith in their work environments. The curriculum would develop and apply a broadly stated workplace theology and systematic understanding of the spiritual dynamics of daily life, and be applicable (as well as tested) in a variety of learning settings.

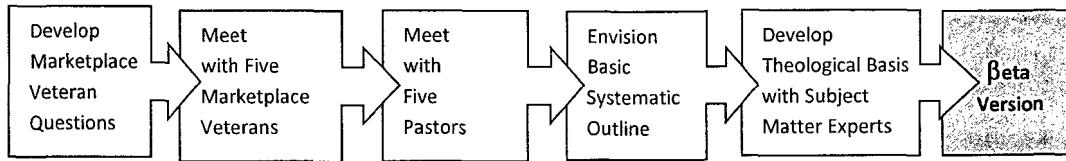


Figure 6: Creation of a Beta Curriculum

In order to ensure the viability and efficacy of such a curriculum, it was also imagined that after a draft of the curriculum had been developed, appropriate audiences from a variety of learning contexts, each with varying degrees of experience and familiarity with work-faith integration review and survey the material to see if proposed learning objectives were met. The content will in turn be revised a number of additional times to better meet the needs of students and learning objectives of the curriculum. This process is further developed with greater detail in Chapter 4: Project Design.

The systematic and practical Theology of Work to be developed should integrate paid and unpaid workers as well as workers from different firms and institutions. Such a resource can have a significant impact. The curriculum will create and develop a common Biblical language of the marketplace as the basis for much of its systematic approach. As a result of the common language the curriculum will help participants realize that they are not alone in their integration efforts and spiritual development. The curriculum will provide a bridge between those active and at work in the institutional church and those at work outside of the church institution. Individuals, their workplaces, and even institutions will be impacted positively as a practical and systematic Theology of Work is applied to daily lives.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE AND RESOURCE REVIEW

As previously mentioned, a series of ten exploratory interviews of workplace disciples from a variety of occupations - ranging from novice to veteran in the Christian faith - and of pastors and theologians interested in the faith at work challenge were conducted prior to and as a basis for the literature review. These interviews focused on the disciple's training in the Theology of Work and both their and the church's use (or non-use) of current material. These interviews were conducted to think through a learner profile and potential changes to the original framework (Appendix A) that would make the final product more useable by following their suggestions and input.

After the interviews had been conducted, the following literature - some of which was suggested in the interviews - was reviewed and surveyed as potential best practice workplace theology material that could also potentially meet (a portion) of the stated objectives for an entry level curriculum. Several of these are stand-alone study guides that help workplace folk approach faith at work. Most of the resources listed also include discussion questions, or have separate study guides. A few represent excellent content and a framework that could have study guides created. All materials were examined for their usefulness in content and pedagogy as study guides and material that would be ripe for a study guide. Each of these summaries also lists the main contributions and target audience of the author as a way of introduction.

**The Fabric of This World: Inquiries into Calling, Career Choice, and the Design of Human Work by Lee Hardy (1990)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Thorough statement and understanding of the historical background and problems in integrating faith and work.

TARGET AUDIENCE: College and Graduate Students and those working through a basic understanding of work.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: *The Fabric of this World* is a superior and readable approach in addition to being an accessible in depth study of the history of work.

Hardy's history chapters provides an excellent overview of the chronological contours of work and faith. By tracing several themes through various stages of theological development holds the reader's attention while giving out the appropriate amount of information. The reformation was jumped over in Hardy's historical progression - quickly moving from the Medieval period to Marx – a summary would have been helpful in addition to elsewhere elaborating a smoother movement and greater linkage made from the Reformation and its shortcomings which developed into Marxism and Freudism. It was interesting to note that the outgrowths of humanistic thought took hold given the individual and societal shortcomings of Luther and Calvin alluded to in Hardy's following chapters.

**The Word In Life Study Bible (1996)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Reading the Scriptures with an application to daily life.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Believers of all ages.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT - In addition to having a very good summary of a basic theology of work and the marketplace, the best part about this Bible are the exercises and vignettes developed by Pete Hammond that serve as good study exercises. The weakness of such an approach is that the best information (outside of the Bible) is put into vignettes in various articles, rather than presented as a comprehensive organized whole. Many of the articles included serve as a basic reference point, especially in their orientation to this particular Study-Bible's audience.

**The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective**

**by R. Paul Stevens (2000)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS:** Expands view of calling by bringing in subjects like family, citizenship, Sabbath, friends, and hospitality towards outsiders and strangers.

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Introductory Level / Popular Theology

**RELATION TO THE PROJECT:** Paul Stevens does a good job walking through seven days of the week (despite the title) talking through issues of calling as neighbor, parent, child, spouse, worker, neighbor, etc. Great content which hangs well around the seven day rubric. Stevens is very good at a 100-200 introductory level read with broad enough scope to make a good comparison stylistically and from a content standpoint as potentially relevant to the theological portions of the Gospel Centered Work study.

**Business for the Glory of God by Wayne A. Grudem (2003)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS:** A deeper theological and philosophical study of the foundations of business

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Christian Businesspersons looking to think theologically and Theologians who need to think more positively about Business. Grudem looks to start the conversation between the two.

**RELATION TO THE PROJECT:** A good study, which focuses on those who see Business as their calling and works through the case for the kingdom and ethical value of business. Probably a 200 level study, but focus is to cover the institutional needs and purposes of the business community. The content includes information that many would learn in a basic MBA course through the lens of biblical theology, which is helpful if your professional area did not include these topics (e.g. pastors and those without a business background who perhaps have been critical of business). Good introduction for those not familiar with business who have missed its cultural value and theological potential for neighborly good.

**Doing God's Business: Meaning and Motivation for the Marketplace**

**by R. Paul Stevens (2006)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: A thoughtful and applied approach to a theology of business.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Businesspersons within the Church

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: Paul Stevens writes a systematic approach that integrates and presents a lot of its material in a Bible/Book Study format. Much more could be done to help this volume be more cohesive or internally coherent between parts 1 and 2. The book has a lot of case studies and discussion questions structured so that readers ponder their placement in the marketplace and the concept of seeking God in all decisions they make, especially those within the marketplace which can be segmented off from spiritual life. Stevens does a good job of bridging professions and providing practical snippets and segments that make the book less wooden and more alive.

**Living in a Pluralistic Culture (pdf Study Guide) By Tim Keller (2006)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: A case for a reformed understanding of Cultural Models of Theological and Philosophical Engagement.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Bible Study Groups

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: This study guide works through cultural ethical case studies from Esther and Daniel. The study guide also looks at how the Church gets it wrong (some of which is booked up in the book *Center Church*). This is an excellent Bible Study done by Redeemer New York that gets to a Biblical understanding of "Pluralism", and how as believers we should respond to it. Walks through the books of Daniel Judges and Esther as case studies for Biblical belief operating in pluralistic contexts. This study also taps into a significant number of Gospel-Centered dynamics at several appropriate points. Many ideas from the study are directly relevant to a 100 level study such as the Gospel Centered Life at work.

## **Why Business Matters to God: And What Still Needs to Be Fixed**

**by Jeffrey B. Van Duzer (2010)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: A significant theology of business and application oriented book. Probably best on the subject.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Christian Businesspersons and Theological Skeptics.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: Jeff Van Duzer's *Why Business Matters to God* is an insightful perspective on the Theology of Work written from a business perspective.

This is the first book that I have seen that orients a theology of business around the Creation = Fall = Redemption paradigm, which is a significant development in the field. Van Duzer develops 'the Fall' as a systematic piece, where others would gloss over the subject and move on to redemption quickly. Van Duzer's book is a very accessible treatment to anyone who has a basic understanding of theology, and business. He states that his audience is business people over the broad marketplace spectrum, but it should be noted that many of these concepts are relevant to, and could be broadened to a wider audience – although it is recognized that this is not the author's stated purpose. The Creation = Fall = Redemption paradigm of human history is helpful, in part because he is able to weave in a theology of 'the Fall' and its impact on the institution of business.

## **Professionals: Men and Women Partnering in Everyday Life**

**by Rob Alexander (2009)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: A Basic Theology of Daily Life

TARGET AUDIENCE: Seminary Students and Theologically Academics

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: Professionals is my first book which serves as a basic theological structure for *Gospel Centered Life at Work*. The main feature of the book is the CREATION, PROVIDENCE, REDEMPTION paradigm which gets fleshed out at a personal and communal level, which will be carried over into *Gospel Centered Life at Work*. The book is dense and written for a non-lay audience.

**Making Room for Life: Trading Chaotic Lifestyles for Connected Relationships by Randy Frazee (2003) and Making Room for Neighbors Curriculum by Max Lucado and Randy Frazee (2011)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: The importance of Sabbath and Community

TARGET AUDIENCE: Introductory Bible Study

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: Frazee and Lucado have developed an application heavy treatment of relational evangelism in these two resources. The unique concepts around deliberately creating personal and relational life margins are contained in Frazee's *Making Room for Life*. *Making Room for Neighbors* represents a further application in an even simpler format.

**Workplace Grace and Workplace Grace Study Participant's Guide: Becoming a Spiritual Influence at Work by Bill Peel, Walt Larimore (2010)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: A helpful evangelism book in the professional realm.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Those who are evangelistically shy within the Church.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: The content here is a good parallel companion to *Tell the Truth* by Metzger, which suggests how to move deeper in relationships. Rather than dealing in the realm of apologetics, Peel and Larimore work more in the process area, especially as applied to the workplace. The contribution that Peel and Larimore make is a process orientation of moving a person from 'Cynic' all the way to 'Disciple' - shown in chart form on Page 24 of *Workplace Grace*. Peel and Larimore's focus is in helping people share their faith in the workplace. Bill Peel and Walt Larimore's book stands alongside other evangelism classics including *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell, *The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel, and *Tell the Truth* by Will Metzger.

**Taking Your Soul to Work: Overcoming the 9 Deadly Sins of the Workplace by R. Paul Stevens, Alvin Ung and Eugene H. Peterson (2010)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Another great application oriented book by Stevens on accessing and using the Fruit of the Spirit in the workplace.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Workers and those interested in growing the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: This book does an excellent job of systematically bouncing the fruits of Spirit up against corresponding sin and imagining what a Spirit driven life might look like. The methodology used fleshes out a seven classic virtue/vice model coupled with Fruits of the Spirit systematically. One weakness is the introductory approach to spiritual dynamics (For example the book address sloth, but does not address the opposing sin in an idolatrous dynamic where we substitute work/leisure in God's place in the workplace in the form of workaholism). The book's emphasis is a virtue ethic approach which while good, can at times lack power and the ability to personally and biblically integrate. This book is an excellent integration of the theological and practical. The dialogical approach between the authors is helpful for the introductory reader.

### **Desiring the Kingdom by James K.A. Smith (2009)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Understanding of a Christian learning model and how competing institutions shape heart (imagination), head (thoughts) and gut (habits).

TARGET AUDIENCE: Academically oriented for those in the theological academy and historically Christian universities

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: Jamey Smith's work has been groundbreaking and thought provoking within the Christian academy because he promotes a model of education that has been lost in the west. The model he proposes moves beyond just the cognitive or even the applied to get at how societal "cultures" and institutions shape our imaginations and how the Church in particular should be shaping our imaginations and fighting various other imaginations that the marketplace, government, academy and home would want us to imagine are ultimate and what we are encouraged to long for.

### **To Change the World by James Davison Hunter (2010)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: An academically oriented case for the embrace of faith in the marketplace.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Academic

**RELATION TO THE PROJECT:** James Davison Hunter's groundbreaking work has opened up a discussion among the intellectual population on the practical implications on a new perspective on the theology of work and culture. Specifically he does a terrific job of advocating, not what individual believers should do in the marketplace, but how the Church should be thinking about the ministry of believers in the marketplace. The book is aimed at an academic and theologian level and does a great job in artistically systematizing positive statements about what the Church should endeavor to be about, especially as it relates to the common good and culture being changed by Christians in the marketplace.

### **The Gospel Centered Life by Bob Thune and Will Walker (2011)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS:** Popularizes the integration of the gospel beyond a simple understanding of salvation and creates theological constructs that make it practical for personal sanctification to occur in an accessible way.

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Popular Theological / 100-200 Level Bible Study

**RELATION TO THE PROJECT:** This book is the primary model for the approach to be taken in *The Gospel-Centered Life at Work* curriculum and the intent is to run a beta version after this format. The study defines the gospel broadly in the first few chapters and then delve into its application in the following seven. While not directly related to a theology of work, its format will be the model for integrating the topic of work across a multiplicity of persons in church based small groups.

### **Gospel in Life Study Guide: Grace Changes Everything**

**by Timothy Keller (2010)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS:** Along with the *Gospel-Centered Life*, this book is an accessible and superior treatment of how to integrate the Gospel into daily life.

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Popular Theological. A 200-300 Level Bible Study format.

**RELATION TO THE PROJECT:** Keller does a great job here in unfolding a theology of 'Christ and Culture' in a simple manner. Just a chapter on work, so it is not as transferable as in his book *Center Church*, but the content reflects a simple layman's approach that is worth noting. Very similar to content of *The Gospel-Centered Life*, but

more media driven than personal discovery oriented. A good parallel to *The Gospel-Centered Life* in terms of content.

### **Every Good Endeavor by Tim Keller (2012)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Makes a case for the value of work and what it means to be a believer in the workplace.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Christian workers in every aspect and sphere of their work. A 300 Level, philosophical approach.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: *Every Good Endeavor* is divided into three parts: (1) God's design for work; (2) the fallenness of work; and (3) how the gospel should inform our work. Parts Two and Three have been labeled as the most significant contributions, especially where the fallenness of work helps sanctify us and rubs up against the gospel. He approaches this portion subject by subject rather than integrating it back into the theology of part 1. Finally Keller also tackles Sabbath rest in the context of work. His is a thorough treatment and content of the subject of spiritual dynamics as they relate to work. The book seems to be light on evangelism and relationship building. It seems that he is making a case for unbelievers here as well, which perhaps explains the topic's absence.

### **Work Matters by Tom Nelson (2011)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Great basic understanding of a Theology of Work.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Pastors will find this a groundbreaking popular introduction and approach to workplace theology from the perspective of another pastor.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: Nelson's book is divided into two sections. The first four chapters are theological foundations - Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration. He states that work is integral to God's design for human beings, and a primary means by which humans worship God. Though our work is fallen - stemming from the brokenness of humanity and the world, the redeeming work of Jesus on the cross also extends the possibility of redemption toward daily life. Redemption brings out the possibility of eternal significance in our work, because Jesus' resurrection points to the coming restoration of all things. The remaining chapters develop and apply the

theological concepts above, but not in a distinct or systematic connected way (1) Our workplace shapes us; (2) We work towards common good; (3) Giftedness and *Imago Dei*; (4) Workplace Challenges; and (5) What the Church should be doing. I found the content very similar to the outline of *Gospel Centered Life at Work*, with a similar systematic construct and small group orientation. There also was a failure to tackle workplace evangelism and relationship building in a significant way, which as in the case of Tim Keller's *Every Good Endeavor*, also was probably not part of the author's stated purpose.

### **Gospel Centered Work by Tim Chester (2013)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Introductory material integrating gospel to daily life.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Workers in the Church.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: *Gospel Centered Work* is an introductory curriculum on the theology of work with similar content to *Work Matters* by Tom Nelson. *Gospel Centered Work* is in a weekly study and simple devotional format, but lacks an integrated systematic approach. Contrary to the title there is not an integrated understanding or process for taking the reader through gospel dynamics (Sanctification by Faith) as they should apply to the world of work, especially for a book that claims to be gospel-centered. Certainly encourages the reader to be more integrated and sanctified but doesn't really giving them a whole lot of tools to do so.

### **Fruit at Work by Chris Evans (2012)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: A pietistic work-centered understanding of the integration of faith and work

TARGET AUDIENCE: Popular Theological 200-300 level.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: *Fruit at Work* is a devotional styled book that walks the reader through the Fruits of the Spirit as a device for developing values in the workplace. After an introduction to the topic and Biblical Exegesis of each chapter (Joy peace patience, kindness, etc.) the chapters seemed to become very case study heavy, which may be part of the design. Chris Evans speaks from a perspective that many Christian writers lack – that of a business person (and thereby makes a negative a

positive!) He does a good job of digging into the meaning of the 'fruit of the Spirit' from Galatians 5, but fails to really get underneath the Fruits of the Spirit to explain the process by which Christians are sanctified. A great 100 level resource, but not aimed at a motivational level.

### **Theology of Work (TOW) Project (Including forthcoming TOW Book Series)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUBTIONS:** A Biblical Theology resource that looks at the Bible verse by verse and comments on the Bible's perspective on specific aspects of work exegetically. Also looks at specific subjects and cross references them biblically and theologically. [www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org) is a great format for the project because the content of such an endeavor is continually growing and is "open sourced" for contributions from many spheres.

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Laymen interested in a biblical perspective on their work, as well as Bible Students and Pastors 200+ Level

**RELATION TO THE PROJECT:** A massive endeavor that is well done. A tremendous resource that will help those who are searching for the Bible's understanding of a particular aspect of work, work that understanding through biblically and systematically. Doesn't necessarily work participants and users through a systematic approach to knowledge, but does what it is meant to do – serve as a significant contribution as a reference resource.

### **The Heavenly Good of Earthly Work by Darrell Cosden (2006)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS:** The best theological treatment of the underlying competing theological nuances that create a sacred/secular and physical/spiritual dichotomy within both Protestantism and Catholicism. Not only does Cosden supply a diagnosis but also makes a very contribution towards the cure with his emphasis that the restoration of all things will involve the integration of the new heavens and new earth – the physical and the spiritual in one package. He also makes a very good case for how our current earthly work will be used and useful in heaven.

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Cosden does a great job of hitting the subject at a solid 200 level and patiently bringing along those who are new to the topic – a 100 level.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: Cosden's work on glorification is particularly helpful and will serve as the basis for both the diagnosis and cure in *the Gospel-Centered Life at Work*.

### **The Lawyer's Calling by Joseph Allegretti (1996)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Allegretti does a very good job of presenting a basic framework of work and faith, especially as it relates to the legal profession. He offers one of the best professionally integrated approaches that exists. His presentation of differing models of faith work integration (or lack thereof) is also excellent – plain and simple with a lack of theological jargon.

TARGET AUDIENCE: 200 Faith and Work Learners, especially those in legal fields.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: Allegretti's treatment of Faith and Work integration models parallels the work of Neihbur, but Allegretti more importantly does so in a simple, more presentable and non-jargoned way. Allegretti's work will be helpful and foundational as the faith and work integration models are reviewed.

### **God's Politics by Jim Wallis (2005)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Wallis does an excellent job of diagnosing the current political discourse and the enamourment of the right wing political engagement of Protestants, especially those within evangelicalism. He also does a very good job of suggesting ways that both the more left leaning and right leaning branches of the current political spectrum could reform their biblical understanding. His idea of Prophetic Politics is helpful for the average voter, but perhaps lacking when considering those who have chosen to make a career within a specific party.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Christians who vote.

RELATION TO THE PROJECT: Wallis' prophetic politics are helpful when thinking about justice issues, not just politically, but in many work settings. We need to access the full spectrum of gospel values when we think about God's work in the public square and not just those at hand or being reacted to in a specific moment.

### **Left, Right and Christ, Lisa Harper and David Innes (2012)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: A unique book that attempts to take current political footballs (e.g. immigration, healthcare, same sex marriage, etc.) and give a substantial Christian response to each of these items from a both the perspective of someone on the right and left of the political spectrum. The dialogical approach is very helpful in not coming up with knee jerk solutions as we think especially about the underlying role of government in our lives and how we can speak into it. The section on capitalism is especially helpful in affirming ways that the political ends of the spectrum could reform their views on business and the marketplace.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Christians who vote, those involved in political process including those with passions about specific political issues and the underlying spiritual questions that drive.

RELATION TO PROJECT: The dialogical approach is helpful, especially as we consider how Christians from different perspectives and walks of life who want to follow Jesus deeply, have different perspectives from our own. When brought face to face with real Christ followers who have integrated faith and life/work differently than us, we are forced to deal with our underlying assumptions and are always richer for the interaction. I would have liked to see more on creating the process of helpful dialogue and common ground, rather than articulating sides of an argument. Perhaps that is the hard work of community where that needs to take place.

### **Faith, Freedom, and Higher Education – P.C. Kemeny, Editor (2013)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: This reader on the historical and philosophical transformation of the American University system from something linked integrally with faith to the two sided coin of Sacred and Secular that we have today is top notch. I especially enjoyed the essay “Christianity and Higher Education: Why Exclusion Is a Compliment” by D.G. Hart. Hart examines the historical contours of religious education in the university and rightly asks “do we really want secular universities to teach about orthodox Christianity?” I disagree in part with his conclusion that faith ought to be consigned to a private realm in one sense, but also see the merits of such a position when it comes to public universities in a secular society.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Christians in Academics, especially higher education.

RELATION TO PROJECT: The variety of opinions of Christians deeply embedded in higher education is especially helpful. This explains why context is so very important and also how listening to fellow believers in a variety of contexts can enrich everyone's experience. In reading the book I believe that the best place to articulate and experience the faith – work integration paradigm is from within the Church, parachurch, and also within Christian Higher Education as an extension of the Church.

### **Lectures on Calvinism by Abraham Kuyper (1943)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: This lecture series is the pinnacle effort by Kuyper to outline his theory of sphere sovereignty. These lectures were delivered at Princeton Theological Seminary in the late 1800s by Kuyper himself. Kuyper would later become Prime Minister of the Netherlands where he had the chance to work out his proposed system in greater detail and application. The book is recommended as “essential reading” for Christians who are reflective of the relationship between faith and any and all spheres of life. The book is also a catalog of the beneficial history that Calvinism had on various areas of endeavor in the societies it has impacted, and why it produced those effects (the anti-Semitism of Europe during the same time period can also be traced to these roots as well). This accurate criticism of Calvinism also does not take into account the abuses of the philosophy as presented by Kuyper.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Christians interested in work and faith integration at an academic level. Not a popularized book and language tends to be a bit formal.

RELATION TO PROJECT: Kuyper's sphere sovereignty system is the foundational modern understanding for how faith can and should work in a “secular” system.

### **The Dangerous Act of Loving your Neighbor by Mark Labberton (2010)**

MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS: Mark Labberton does a tremendous job of creating a systematic theology of love of neighbor. He looks at the Scriptural aspects of the concept in an accessible well written way that meets the reader at a high popular level bordering on the Theologically Academic level. Labberton works the concept of

neighborly love through a theological grid of mercy, justice, suffering, righteousness and worship. Extremely helpful for those passionate about any one of these subjects.

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Accessible theology for Pastors and Academic Theological.

**RELATION TO THE PROJECT:** Labberton's understanding of suffering and neighborly love, as well as the neighborly aspects of Sabbath are unique and helpful as we think about the daily life faith integration of our work.

### **Gospel-Centered Productivity by Ryan Pelton (2014)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS:** Ryan does a good job of helping the reader understand how personal idolatry and the motivations under our actions can get in the way of our productivity. Likewise he does a good job unpacking how the Cultural Mandate and the gospel intersect. It is a short work, so different aspects of these two main ideas are unpacked in different ways, mostly for those in the workplace.

**TARGET AUDIENCE:** Christian professionals interested with the integration of gospel into daily life.

**RELATION TO THE PROJECT:** Ryan's work at integration especially in the Creation Mandate realm helped affirm that the aspects that are being developed in the project are on track, and also unique – especially of fleshing through the redemptive and providential aspects of work that other people aren't covering.

### **What's Best Next by Matt Perman (2014)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTION:** Matt fleshes out particular aspects of the Cultural Mandate and the Gospel in the manner in which we behave and operate at work. The routines, motivations, interactions, and habits we have as we daily carry out our work are thoroughly under his scrutiny and the scrutiny of the gospel. The book can best be explained as the seven habits of highly effective people, but written from a gospel perspective. Matt centers more on approaches to our work life, especially the work of professionals in the office environment. A helpful and well done book by the former Director of Strategic Planning for John Piper and Desiring God ministries.

**MAIN AUDIENCE:** The main audience is those who understand the gospel who work in an office or professional environment, especially within technical fields. His

understanding is at a 200 or 300 level, hitting those who have been in graduate school in some form and want to go deeper into their motivation behind daily habits and routines.

**RELATION TO PROJECT:** Matt shows the next steps for those who are interested in fleshing out the gospel at an in depth daily life level. His work would be a good jumping off point after Gospel Centered Life at Work for those in a professional realm that want to take the study deeper and in more nuanced ways.

### **Housewife Theologian by Aimee Byrd (2013)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTION:** For women today the label housewife carries negative implications and attending to the mundane things of daily life is denigrated. A Theological understanding of calling helps women move beyond stereotypes to embrace their calling and recast it in a positive light regardless of where they do their work. Byrd encourages all Christians to be theologians and to know that God is woven into the acts and actions of everyday life.

**MAIN AUDIENCE:** Introductory Level for Women engaged in unpaid working environment (the home).

**RELATION TO PROJECT:** Byrd's understanding of unpaid work as a calling helps affirm the broad reach of the project and shows that this area of calling is not often thought of in the realm of calling and needs to be reasserted to empower women paid and unpaid.

### **POP-OLOGETICS: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective**

**by Ted Turnau (2012)**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTION:** Ted does a terrific and as always thorough job at working a Creation = Fall = Redemption paradigm through a “culture” grid. Popular Culture is one of those areas that has been off limits for Christians, but Ted does a great job of explaining how and why we should understand it. His work in this area is groundbreaking and thorough. Ted works his ideas from worldview and culture all the way through to application within the pop culture realm. The best portion of his book

works through the poor models of engaging our work/culture prevalent within Christianity and shows what a transformational model looks like.

**MAIN AUDIENCE:** Those engaged in the entertainment industry in all its forms, as well as academics and theologians who have frowned on those engaged in pop culture in all its forms.

**RELATION TO PROJECT:** Turnau's use of both the CREATION = FALL = REDEMPTION paradigm is helpful here, as well as his nuances on the poor models of cultural engagement or what would be called faith integration in other circles.

### **Art and the Christian Mind**

**By Laurel Gasque**

**MAIN CONTRIBUTION:** This biographical work of the life of Hans Rookmaker develops and utilizes a faith grid for evaluating and undergirding the arts in a narrative within its biographical account. The book underscores the reality that Christian art is more than just the presentation of religious subjects or art sponsored by the church, but instead can be one that is undergirded by faith that makes cultural statements to deliberately challenge and shape culture in a way that glorifies God and shapes the world to look more like his kingdom. Rookmaker made it his life work to challenge the "dainty pietism of much of British and American evangelicalism".<sup>1</sup> Theological underpinnings and philosophy are spread throughout, but in a more concentrated way in the chapters entitled 'Passions' and 'Legacy'.

**MAIN AUDIENCE:** Artists and those who appreciate the arts

**RELATION TO PROJECT:** Shows a unique, narratively organized treatment of the Christian faith integrated in to the arts, and what is possible for someone to encourage faith in the arts, not overtly but through personal philosophy/ministry. Theology is integrated and interspersed in the book to spark the imagination of artists and art lovers.

**Center for Faith & Work at LeTourneau University**

[www.centerforfaithandwork.com](http://www.centerforfaithandwork.com)

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<sup>1</sup> Laurel Gasque. *Art and the Christian Mind: the life and work of H.R. Rookmaaker* (Madison, WI: IVPPress, 2005), 116.

MAIN CONTRIBUTION: A centralized repository hub for blogposts, videos, articles and virtual resources for faith and work. Much of the focus is on business and leadership. The site/center also contains helpful information on integrating faith and work in congregations and the worship life of a church.

MAIN AUDIENCE: Faith and Work integration works from both the business side and church side. Because of the format a great place to break down perceived barriers between the two.

RELATION TO PROJECT: An excellent resource that has material at all levels of understanding of faith and work integration, as well as a variety of professions, especially for business enterprises.

### **Made to Flourish**

[www.madetoflourish.org](http://www.madetoflourish.org)

MAIN CONTRIBUTION: A virtual space dedicated to bringing those in the church who are passionate or inquirers about how to integrate faith and work in innovative ways, with stories, models, case studies and resources to do just that.

MAIN AUDIENCE: Pastors and Church leaders.

RELATION TO PROJECT: Made to flourish goes beyond curriculum resources to provide real life models and case studies of people working in the integration trenches. Their long term goal is to integrate the online community with physical community. A great strategy with great potential, building resources to fill the gap of some of the weakness uncovered in the research phase of the Gospel Centered Life at Work development.

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### **Literature Review Insights:**

The literature reviewed for this project was identified as potentially useful in forming a knowledge base for a commonly understood ‘Theology of Work’ and workplace practices (evangelism helps, devotional works, etc.) that could flow from that theology. It is also of note that the literature reviewed was written with one of three central undergirding organizational strategies. This revelation is significant as we undertake

the development of a foundational and universal introductory curriculum. The perspectives of multiple professions and thinkers are useful and helpful in creating an imagination for the possibilities of the project. Stepping back to understand their classification and systemization was extremely helpful in thinking about which ideas should be used, what form or structure they should be transmitted in, as well as the resources themselves forming a potential body of literature for the project,

The first type noted is what would be labeled as ‘priestly’ in its approach. Such material is geared towards changing the heart and emotions and is topically oriented. Meeting people where they are and developing the material in such a way that it creates change within the reader. *Workplace Grace* by Peel and Larimore, *Work Matters* by Tom Nelson and *Housewife Theologian* by Byrd are good example of this type of material and approach.

The second type noted is what would be labeled as a ‘prophetic’ approach and focus on invoking change in the reader though a ‘biblical - theological’ exegesis, or narrative approach to the framework. In this approach a thorough understanding and in depth look at the stories of the bible (biblical narrative) is the main organizational principle used. *Work Matters* by Stevens, *Living in a Pluralistic Culture* by Keller and possibly the forthcoming *The Accidental Executive* by Erisman are all varied examples of this approach. Similarly the biographical form of *Art and the Christian Mind* by Gasque which looks at the life of H.R. Rookmaaker is an interesting read that captures the imagination about the theological foundations for beauty and order in a narrative (a-biblical) structure.

The third type is labeled as a ‘kingsly’ approach. In the ‘kingsly’ or organized and didactic approach an outside organizational grid is applied and worked through the systemization. This outside grid overlay is the most prevalent approach and includes a variety of organizational grids such as:

- Creation = Fall = Redemption = Glorification (as found in *Heavenly Good of Earthly Work* by Cosden and *Why Business Matters to God* by Van Duzer.)
- History of Work (as found in *Fabric of this World* by Hardy)
- Gospel (as found in *Gospel in Life* by Keller)
- Vocational Topics/Ethics (in *Lawyers Calling* by Allegretti and *God's Politics* by Wallis)
- Worship and Pedagogy (found in *Desiring the Kingdom* by Smith)
- The Fruits of the Spirit (as found in *Fruit at Work* by Evans)

Each of these approaches has its strengths and opportunities, which should be considered in the development of an accessible foundational curriculum. It is expected that the best curriculum will draw on multiple learning styles and multiple forms of curriculum (Systematic, Narrative and Interactive). It should also be noted that The Theology of Work project is another great resource that is both broad and comprehensive enough to incorporate and utilize all of these different pedagogical approaches, but also specific enough that it can also reflect thoughtful insights within professions and institutions. Insights and opportunities from all these approaches (Priestly, Prophetic and Kingly) are all critical components of the foundational work to be undertaken. An analysis of the systematic approach (especially the use of Creation = Fall = Redemption) is a critical piece when considering a preferred approach on which to build other curriculum methodologies and perspectives.

It should also be noted that in the time period of the past five years, the body of literature has grown, especially the creation of several new introductory works including Keller's *Every Good Endeavor*, and *Gospel in Life*, as well as *Gospel Centered Work* by Tim Chester. With the release of these books during the time period of this thesis project, in addition to the release of *The Gospel Centered Life at Work* curriculum in August 2014, the stated gaps in the literature are narrowing as materials oriented towards the gaps are becoming accessible.

## CHAPTER 3: THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

After the interviews and literature review were undertaken, a draft Theological Framework and biblical content for the project was developed in conjunction with *Gospel-Centered Life* subject matter experts at World Harvest Mission (now Serge) in Philadelphia in the summer of 2012. A number of theological understandings and convictions were held in common with World Harvest and undergird the work and faith curriculum which gained the working title '*The Gospel Centered Life at Work.*'

The first shared conviction was the Reformed understanding that our life in Christ and with Christ is what drives and fuels our life in the world. Conversely stated humanity has no power to be justified or sanctified without Christ initiating and working on our behalf to the Glory of God.

Second is an understanding that the 'big story' of God can be summed up in the idea that there was a Creation, that man Fell, and Jesus has brought about humanity's Redemption. We are now participating in and undergoing Sanctification as a result and will one day undergo a complete Glorification, when Jesus returns and heaven and earth become one. These are best summed up in the 'big (scriptural) ideas' of the Creation Mandate, Great Commandment, and Great Commission.

As we have already suggested, there were also several proposed shared objectives for the curriculum as it was being formulated. The curriculum was to:

- Be written for the introductory level, English speaking<sup>1</sup>, workplace disciple,
- Be systematic in its approach,
- Be Broadly Reformed and Grace-Based in its theological stance,
- Be oriented towards a variety of professions (and both male and female genders)
- Be application-oriented including spiritual dynamics and personal sanctification.

The framework developed should incorporate a basic theology of work and a descriptive understanding of the gospel applied to the workplace through the commonly held ‘Creation = Fall = Redemption’ structure. (You may remember in chapter one we discussed a basic framework with the five marketplace veterans and five pastors that we could springboard off of. The results of those interviews also led us to want to incorporate the creation – fall – redemption structure as well as the three big ideas of the Creation Mandate, Great Commandment and Great Commission as important existing constructs and concepts for both the laity and church professionals we were aiming the potential curriculum towards, which we could build on. )

When discussing how these ideas related to work and the workplace we wanted to state the ideas of “Fall” more positively and brainstormed how that might be articulated. The provision of God’s loving grace, mercy and care despite our willful and ongoing rebellion was one of the things that we settled in on. This discussion served as the foundational idea of “Provision” which captured the idea of God’s providing in the midst of our fall and rebellion.

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<sup>1</sup> Non-English versions of the curriculum were discussed with the publisher. It was decided that due to the translation effort required the effort would be limited to English Language materials for now. Spanish and Chinese are future possibilities but would require more focus groups and research as to the cross – cultural aspects of examples, exercises and theological and ethical dilemmas faced within other cultures.

So in the summary of thinking about the big ideas for the book three big headings were assigned to cover the corresponding threee main theological constructs: **CREATION** (which would cover the imagebearing and imitating aspects of the Creation Mandate), **PROVISION** (which would cover the Great Commandment ideas of how we serve and love God and others imitating and relying on God's mercy and grace even in the midst of sin and rebellion) and **REDEMPTION** (which would cover the relational and evangelistic aspects of the Great Commission). Finally the end of the book would talk about **SABBATH** and the need for authentic rest and relationship with God and what that looks like in the New Heavens and Earth. We also recognized the need to set up a **BASIC THEOLOGY OF WORK** and ongoing **DILEMMAS OF FAITH INTEGRATION** (physical/spiritual and sacred/secular) in opening chapters.

While it was not possible to work through every nuance of the entire framework in ten chapters, a topical curriculum structure emerged from these discussions around shared objectives and the basic theology believed to be necessary for a well-equipped workplace disciple. The curriculum agreed upon by myself as the author, the editors at New Growth Press, and World Harvest Mission was as follows:

1. The first chapter develops a basic theology of the goodness and original design of Work.
2. The second chapter develops the fallenness of Work (and introduces the Gospel).
3. The third chapter would develop a basic theological understanding of The Gospel and how that understanding changes the way believers should approach fallen work, and potential pitfalls in doing so.

4. The following six chapters would develop and apply a framework of three pairs of alternating Godward and Neighbor-ward components that work out the Creation Mandate, Great Commandment, and Great Commission as the basis for those pairings. These aspect pairings would be summarized under the big headings of CREATION, PROVISION AND REDEMPTION.

5. A final chapter on Sabbath would include the important work-faith understanding of glorification and consummation especially as it relates to Sabbath as a precursor to the singular new heavens and new earth.

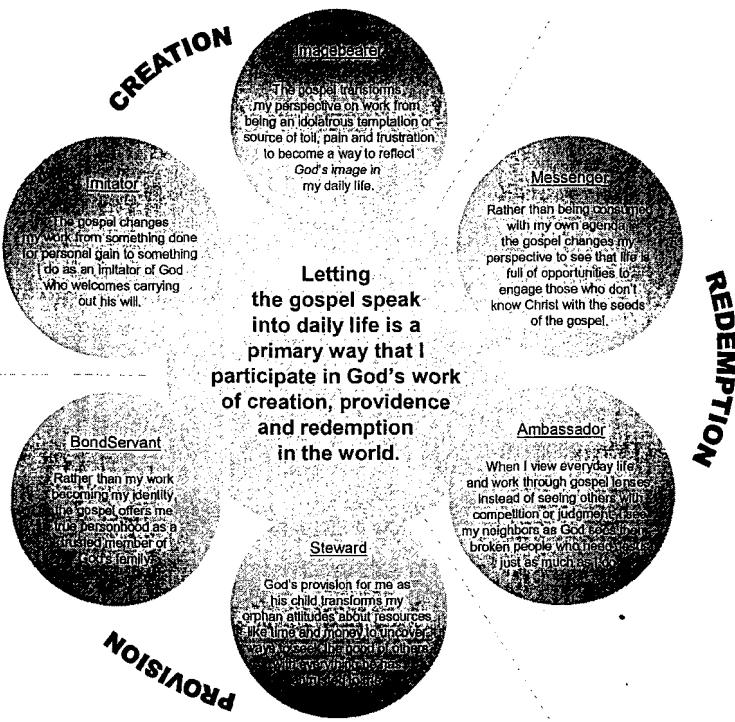


FIGURE 7: Diagram of Proposed Framework

It was also important from a systematic standpoint to not just cover subject matter alone, but also to ensure that a number of topically significant gospel transformation ideas were applied over the series of ten lessons. A first run at an intra-chapter

framework to be employed over the ten lessons was proposed and can be summarized through the concepts of:

- **Big Ideas** for each chapter including specific **Gospel Transformation Statements**.
- The **Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm** being addressed within the chapter.
- How the Big Idea will be developed in the chapter **Introduction**.
- **Bible Passages** and concepts that will be utilized in the chapter.
- The purpose developed in the main **Article**, and the basic ideas in article structure.
- The **Exercise** developed and the developmental goal within each chapter.

Let's review a rough sketch of the Biblical Framework and Theological Outlines developed lesson by lesson, starting with the introduction. (*Note that this outline does not reflect the draft or final form of the curriculum shown in Appendixes which were developed after initial reviews by subject matter experts and focus groups who worked through the curriculum in small group, large group and one on one settings*).

## INTRODUCTION: VOCATION

### **Big Idea:**

What work is, and why it matters. Put the whole study in context that our primary calling is as a beloved child of God. That calling informs all others... which is what this study explores. What is it to be a called person? How is vocation different from a career? How does a vocational context fit into the premise of being called to follow and worship Christ in all things?

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## LESSON 1: HOW DOES THE GOSPEL RELATE TO WORK?

### **Big Idea:**

Letting the gospel transform daily life is a primary way believers participate in God's call to partnership in the creation, providence and redemption of the world.

*A gospel centered understanding of work reframes 'work' from merely being a set of things we must do - which are often painful, and which don't have much to do with God - to become "vocation" which is a primary way we engage God in faith as we seek to follow Christ and his purposes in a fallen world. This is true no matter who we are or what our 'job' is.*

**Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm:**

We live in a state of Rebellion and Estrangement from God which:  
Produces bent relationships with one another, self, creation ... even to our work and workplaces.

Our identity as blessed and beloved children (and vocational heirs) that reflect and follow the character and work of God has been replaced by a pursuit of our identity through our work and the products of our work. (Romans 4)

The re-establishment of our belovedness allows work to return to its proper secondary relationship, under our relationship to Christ (Luther vocation) it is re-elevated as a holy response to relationship with God and a major “platform” for our sanctification and restored “whole” relationship with God, ourselves, one another and even creation. Our work is a major context that should reflect the character and glory of God in the world. We do this as: Partners in Creation (Witnesses/Agents), Providence (Servant/Steward), and Redemption (Ambassador/Messenger) all of which form the introductory framework to the book.

**Introduction:**

What is work (Broad Definition for all people, not just marketplace)?

What is Christian Work/Calling?

How is Work understood as a partnership with the Trinity?

**Bible Passages:**

Delve into some critical passages on contours of work in prefallen and fallen state from Genesis and Romans. List passages that shows a gospel way out of fallen state of work, and point to the future kingdom of God as alluded to in Revelation.

**Article:**

Use Martin Luther as unique springboard for vocation.

What are the contours of how work is fallen, how can it be redeemed?

What does the gospel have to do with its redemption?

**Exercise:**

Introduction of God the Worker – List all the jobs/roles God has in Scripture.

Possible ‘matching’ identification of surprising ‘vocations’ of Biblical Characters showing both their fallenness and how it relates to their redemption. (Noah, Moses, Jacob, David, Solomon, Peter, Paul).

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**LESSON 2: GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION**

**Big Idea:**

How does work make you more like Jesus? How should we think about the hard disappointing and painful things in work? How does sin affect how work in the world? God is in relationship with each one of us, working on our souls and transforming our character through the context of our work, which apart from him is devoid of meaning and full of toil.

*A gospel centered understanding of work elevates work from being a daily grind to being a holy response to relationship with God and a major “platform” for our sanctification in restored relationship to God, ourselves, one another and even creation.*

**Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm:**

Because of Sin, Work has become divorced from God:  
Work has become or feels like “punishment”, “idolatry”, “toil”, and is “painful”  
Work has come about because of enmity of Man with God ... yet still under authority of God.

Christ establishes our identity and meets our needs  
(so that we don't look to a job or fate to do that).  
We now can see work as a context for spiritual formation.  
Pain and Toil push us back towards the Trinity.

Work can now be viewed as a main ways that God transforms us to be like Jesus.

**Introduction:**

God is using us to transform our work context, but even more importantly God is transforming us through our work.  
God is using our work/daily life environments to transform us.  
God replaces toil and pain with meaning in the transformation process

**Bible Passages:**

Look into passages that talk about testing, trial and perseverance.  
Discuss the process and God's desired outcome in our lives. (Christlikeness)

**Article:**

Talk about redemptive work being very painful and messy but necessary.  
Show the interrelationship of toil, testing, meaninglessness and brokenness to push us away from diversions and idols into necessary ‘soul’ work and relationship with God.  
Show that the gospel produces faith and hope that in the midst of personal meaninglessness and toil that allows God to be sovereign and active in my redemption in the context of the restoration of all things.

**Exercise:**

Identify toil and meaninglessness in your life/lives of others.

Identify some of their biggest struggles with work;  
Help them identify and understand what the “sin under the sin” is for them. Pray for what they want to see changed (Make plug for *Gospel-Centered Life* if this all seems very new to them).

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## LESSON 3: HOW WORK HELPS US REPENT IN RELATION TO NEIGHBOR

### **Big Idea:**

Introduce and identify the four ways of Performance and Pretense that mask and subvert the work of the gospel in our lives. Examine how they operate and discuss what repentance might begin to look like.

*The gospel propels us to repent of our ‘bent’ tendencies towards pretense or performance in daily life, and to put on new ways of relating to God and those around us. It is in those new ways of relating that God allows us to participate in the Trinity’s work of creation, providence and redemption in the world*

### **Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm:**

We have bent ways of relating to people and reforming culture built on Performance and Pretense such as:

- Christ calls us to a new way (‘third way’) of relating.
- Fear of pluralistic environment; people who disagree with us.
- Insecurity about identity and our message leads us to avoid roles God has for us.
- Misunderstanding of the gospel.

### **Introduction:**

Where does our bentness come from? How do we reflect Kingdom Values/Godly character while inhabiting a very worldly culture? Avoid extremes of being so earthly minded that we’re no heavenly good (and vice versa). We need to learn how to authentically live in but not of our work world. We confuse Religion with Faith, and operate out of one of the bent ways in name of Christ.

### **Bible Passages:**

Examine Unmerciful Servant and the Parable of the Lost Sons as examples of pretense and performance.

### **Article:**

Relate common ‘religious’ cultural stances to pretense and performance.

Articulate and Recognize the 4 Cultural Change Imposters:

Parallel Culture, Accommodation, Militancy, Privatization.

Kindle a desire to move towards being a Gospel Presence.

Need to list potential gospel responses; and clearly articulate “how gospel is different” to:

Tax Collector/Privatize, Crowds/Assimilate, Zealots/Militancy, Pharisee/Parallel Culture.

**Exercise:**

Perform a Culture Assessment, Diagnose moves to apply Creation Mandate, Great Commandment and Great Commission as gospel corrective. Learning to assess the culture better exercise. (Question: can we be “value added” and see if we can shape questions to help people uncover their own unbelief that causes them to veer toward one of the 4 negative responses).

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## LESSON 4: GOD'S IMAGEBEARERS

**Big Idea:**

This is a “Godward” Creation Mandate Issue and part #1 of Issues of Identity. How do I relate to God as part of his created order, and a relational creature capable of interacting with the creator? As a witness to who God is and what God has done we are able to not just be in relationship with God, but also in restored beloved relationship that reflects the imago Dei and glorifies God because of the good news of the Gospel.

*Eyewitnesses - The gospel transforms work from an enslaving pursuit or set of unpleasant tasks to become God's gracious means of provision for his people and creation. (An eyewitness is someone whose eyes are opened to look at their context and surroundings and attribute them to God's provision and what he is doing in their lives vs attributing them to chance or human effort).*

**Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm:**

Using God's providence and Created Order we try to fulfill our identity w/out God by Minimizing Effort (Leisure as Master) OR Maximizing Effort (Work as Master).

These ideas of Striving and Sloth both rooted in:

- Unbelief and Despising God's Provision
- Both Striving and Sloth have Work/Lack of Work as Source of Identity
- Redemption is Christ becoming master because it was Christ that bore our curse:

Neither Leisure nor Over-Working fulfills apart from relationship to Christ. God provides for us despite our rebellion. God always uses circumstance to be the schoolmaster that points us to Christ. Identity in Christ now primary, all else secondary. Work moves from being a source of toil pain and frustration to become a redeemed pathway that God provides for his creation to connect with Him and work in harmony with his Kingdom purposes in the restoration of all things. (Think about movement from the Garden of Eden to the City of God as an example).

**Introduction:**

Link life of being a beloved adopted child of the King to a life of worship. Discuss how for the believer worship is life / all encompassing. Discuss life of worship / chief end of man / discuss passive and active aspects. Define and liken the concept of “Witness” to a passive aspect of participatory relational living. (Like an infant). Unfold witness as a primarily sensory, fundamentally human (Imago Dei) and personally uniting of heart, soul, mind with the creator. By design of our rebirth God allows us to take in sensorially, process, ponder and value (Like Mary at the Temple with infant Jesus) to give back when appropriate. All creation is witness to God - even the rocks will cry out.

**Bible Passages:**

Introduce Humans as made in Image of God. Discuss how we have ignored image and the gospel reawakens us to both our humanity and the reflection of imago Dei. Discuss implications of being image bearers but also potential relationship breakers that are also capable of being forgiven and forgiving. Foreshadow Striving and Sloth as responses to and reflections of our spiritual blindness and disconnectedness from God. Reference Romans 1. Gospel restores our sight for us to be eyewitnesses. Like Elisha’s servant we need the opening our eyes to spiritual realities. 2 Kings 6:17 Elisha’s prayer.

**Article:**

God’s Economy - Take the idea of *economia* or “household/kingdom” work and expand on it here. Being an eyewitness changes how you view yourself. Your circumstances for Your household ... to Your circumstances for God’s household. (and you as vital participant in God’s household). Rework *economia* material to reflect Imago Dei/Restored relationship with God. Especially consider passive aspect as foundational.

**Exercise:**

Create a Life integration diagnostic that looks at ways that we rely on striving and sloth rather than to the gospel as sources of identity.

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## LESSON 5: IMITATORS OF GOD

**Big Idea:**

This is the “Neighborward” Aspect of the Creation Mandate and Part #2 on Issues of Identity. How do I relate to others as God’s relational Creation. As witnesses to who God is and what God has done, we are able to be not just in Creator/Created relationship, but restored imago mundi relationship that glorifies God in midst of one another. The gospel changes us to want to be the body of Christ in the world to become agents for God that act on his behalf in concert with his character/identity.

**Agents - The gospel changes our perspective on our careers from something we have earned for ourselves to something we have been entrusted with for the sake of others.**

### **Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm**

We are driven to succeed to prove our work/be secure instead of resting in ID as God's child:

- Driven by fear of failing/rejection, being insignificant, poor instead of resting in our ID as God's child.
- Seeing success and failure as the real measure of work, vs. being shaped into the image of Christ.

We have been abusers of Relationships and Situations, Contexts and Roles that God has placed us into because we have served ourselves rather than served God. We see ourselves as having earned and worked for our position, roles and relationships rather than having them entrusted to me and overseen by God.

- Christ's work secures our identity and frees us to serve in role of agents.
- Gospel puts work and daily life second behind relationship to Christ. This is Luther's idea of Station - God places you where you are to be a reflection of his character to those around you. God is doing the work and you and I are joyful eyewitnesses to and therefore agents of his work in the world.

### **Introduction**

We exist as God's agents to help restore the image of God in our neighbors and in creation. Once we know, we can live out of that knowing (rather than Striving or Sloth). Once we know, we are equipped with the groundwork to be able to "do."

Those on the inside (witnesses) have the proper motivation to become agents. Who I am effectively shapes what I do. Just as in 'Witness' chapter we look around and see that we have not been placed within our roles, contexts and circumstances by chance; God has a purpose and plans to use us within and works on us as part of our surrounding relationships and work opportunities. Gospel Centered Work changes us from seeing ourselves as Self Centered Movers and Shakers to become Other Centered Culture Shapers. The gospel frees us up with regard to time and effort so that love really flows out of our work towards others.

### **Bible Passages:**

Examine the person of Daniel. Examine the person of Esther.

Show how God places men and women in their roles to partner with him.

### **Article: How do we partner with God?**

As fellow workers we can only co-create or re-create. We don't cause the plant to grow, we can only influence the environment in which the plant grows. So it is with our work. This is reflected most deeply and more importantly as our agency or partnership with God. We must work in partnership with God. (We can't do what he does, and he has chosen us to subdue fill and name, all as active roles of partnership and dependency to build up his economy). We are appointed each to unique contexts for the sake of God's glory. Ours is to work in partnership to re-create to re-new. Just as we have been shape

molded and created we are the ones by definition who shape, mold, form, and reflect that which is already created. We have only virtual reality. God is the true and greater reality. Our work is made to frame and point back to him.

**Exercise:**

Help people diagnose where they display high levels of emotion or disappointment ... making it about themselves rather than making it about reflecting God's glory. Help people develop a changed perspective on their relational circumstances. (It's all about God's Glory and the expansion of His Kingdom).

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## LESSON 6: – BONDSERVANTS OF JESUS

**Big Idea:**

If we are motivated by the gospel rather than pretense where does our moral courage come from? In the transformation that takes place when we encounter God through the goodness of the gospel, our moral framework undergoes seismic shifts. Suddenly the right thing is not avoiding doing the wrong thing – our sense of what ought to be done is both broadened and deepened, the right thing is a path of freedom out of bondage, fear and shame. We love God out of gratitude. We love God because he first loved us – because he chose us and delights in us. We suddenly can love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Not only has he chosen us – he invites us to become part of his household. In this chapter we examine what it means to move from being ones enslaved because of debt to becoming grateful servants of Christ. Because we live to Christ, instead of working for worldly bosses, we work for Jesus.

***Bondservants - The gospel transforms me in such a way that my character and actions follow a heart of gratitude for Christ's work on my behalf.***

**Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm:**

Why don't I have moral courage?

May indicate underlying unbelief in the reality that God will take care of me:

- Unbelief that gospel provides the acceptance I need, so I go along with the crowd.
- I rely on self-generated righteousness and am a stickler about rules/judge others.
- I love and fear men more than I love and fear God.

How God takes care of us on the cross: We are ...

- Truly Accepted (allowing us to approach God as sons, instead of enemies).
- Truly Forgiven (Christ does for us what we could never do for ourselves).
- Truly Righteous (Takes away our sin, gives us his righteousness).

This means I can choose to pursue the things God loves (honesty, justice, integrity, compassion, generosity) because I'm his child. I work out of gratitude for and understanding of God's work on my behalf frees me up to love God (by obeying his commands and working out his will) rather than fearing men. I view the Law differently – the law now becomes a friend that defines the boundaries of a wide range of Freedom and Safety – working in concert with the Spirit of God. Righteousness is now not about sinning less, but about loving more.

### **Introduction:**

Throughout the New Testament we see the Apostles referring to themselves and other Christ followers as bondservants or '*duolos*' - those who live under Christ's authority and desire to serve him and represent him in all that they do. Just as in marriage, they chose to voluntary intermingle and integrate their identity with the identity of another, for better or worse. Peter calls himself a bondservant of Jesus Christ in II Peter 1:1, Paul in Romans 1:1, James in James 1:1, Jude does so in Jude verse 1, and finally John in Revelation 1:1. These men of God start off their letters with a declaration of bondservanthood which makes us wonder what this word meant to them and what it should mean for us.

Like bondservants in the Old Testament all these men were compelled by gratitude to voluntarily give up the freedom granted to them when their debts were paid. Just like sons, bondservants choose to work for the Master. But unlike most sons they choose to. Only slaves that have been freed know the depths from which man can be lifted to be free. This is how we relate to Great Commandment as sons: gratitude and thanksgiving motivate our ability and compulsion to love and serve others.

### **Bible Passages:**

Look at the Parable of the Talents, coupled with Matthew 25:14-30 coupled with working through a contrast of a Bondservant to the Law (Fear) vs Bondservant to Christ (Risk in Freedom). John 8:34b – 36 says "Everyone who practices sin is a (bondservant) to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. See Galatians 1:10 For is it man's favor or God's that I aspire to? Or am I seeking to please men? If I were still a man-pleaser, I should not be Christ's bondservant. Also Galatians 4:4-7 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" You are no longer (bondservants), but sons, and if sons, then heirs through God.

### **Article: From Bondservants of the Law to Bondservants of Christ**

We can come to view God and the externals of the law or even human rules of performance as a required path for action or as a method of performing to meet the demands of life. The Gospel has us desire Life in Spirit as an alternative. Law defines both boundaries of our actions and reflects character of God. Life in the Spirit and Law of Love for God/Neighbor show us a path of freedom forward. Slaves are motivated

primarily be the Law alone - either meeting it or bucking it at every chance they can. Bondservants in comparison know the Law and are motivated by Love which not only meets but goes beyond the demands of the Law. What about the gospel changes us to love God (his character, the things that represent him like truth, honesty, integrity, goodness) and therefore love others (where we seek their benefit, seek to bless them and love them, be generous so that they too will lean to see what type of heavenly father we have).

**Exercise:**

Show how I'm more concerned with law and staying out of trouble than with loving people as I've been loved. Try not performing and instead loving and see what happens for a week. Case study questions: Asking people to discuss examples of "law issues" and "love issues." These could be called Loving God and Loving Others issues? Need to have people work through their own examples.

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## LESSON 7: STEWARDSHIP IS SERVING GOD THROUGH OTHERS

**Big Idea**

God has entrusted each of us with an area of human rule as a sort of "Chief Servant" that parallels God's rule in the world. The Bible proposes that as believers we are all diakonos or household managers that share in God's oikonomos overseeing resources and relationships for the sake of our savior and king. We love others unconditionally because we are loved unconditionally. Yes we are working for Jesus, but more importantly we are promised that it is Jesus who we serving at both the spiritual and human level.

*Stewards - The gospel allows us to be trusted authorities that love God and love others, which lets us seek the good and service of others in every part of our work. He has placed us where we are to transform our hearts and character while serving him out of gratitude.*

**Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm**

What are some of our sins:

- Being angry with others when they don't do what we want.
- Seeing people as "stressors to avoid or conquer" vs. people to love.
- Poorly motivated behaviors and desires to lead others.
- Feel like "there is no end of trouble" and being fearful, angry or stressed out.

What does the Cross have to say:

- We can avail ourselves to grace when we fail to do what God wants us to.
- Lets us step out to love others, even when I disagree or they've wronged me.
- Lets us love our enemies because Christ loved us.

What does redemption look like?

- When we serve others we serve Christ. (We will be surprised that we were serving Christ in Matthew 25:31-46. How will that happen? Our character was so changed and we welcomed the change so much that we really did allow Jesus to work through us).
- When we are mistreated we understand our savior better
- A Pain and Trouble free existence is not the goal .... Welcoming and speaking into the chaos of the day is our work.

### **Introduction:**

To live as a steward in god's economy means that the people, circumstances and events in our day are no accident, and certainly no surprise to God. Just as he was incarnated in physical place, relational space and time, so we as God's beloved children have been incarnated in many of the same ways. In Mark 7:31 Jesus returns to the Decapolis region where he had previously encouraged the demoniac to return to his oikos or household after plunging a herd of pigs over a cliff with the evil spirits that had possessed the man. This time (in comparison to his welcome where he was driven off by an angry mob) he was warmly welcomed. We don't have all the details of what happened between the two time periods, but we can presume that this one man visibly and radically changed, now in his 'right' mind, restored and working in the rhythms of daily life was what had made the difference. The truest gospel response to seeing ourselves as orphans – abandoned without resources – is seeing ourselves as household managers for the Creator of the World and King of the Universe who gives us all things.

### **Bible Passages:**

God gives us spheres of influence to steward. Ephesians 3:7 calls Paul is a diakonos of the gospel. In Colossians 1:23 Paul encourages Colossians to continue in the hope of the gospel of which he/Paul was made a diakonos/steward. Colossians 1:25 says that Paul is a diakonos/steward of the Colossian church (e.g. entrusted to him). Colossians 4:7 Tychicus is both a faithful steward/diakonos and bondservant/duolos. Matthew 25:31-46 the parable of the Sheep and the Goats, should encourage us that by faith Jesus meets us in our workplace, home, etc. Philippians 2:1-18 encourages us that the work itself done towards others, on his behalf he receives as worship.

### **Article:**

We are all Stewards not Owners of the resources given to us – time, talent, resources. So what is stewardship, why does it matter? As stewards God is more concerned with my character than my actions – I owe my allegiance and serve him, rather than myself. He may be saddened, but he no longer takes offense at me and sees my heart to know whether I am in rebellion or desiring to serve him in my actions. The truth of gospel frees me to live boldly with great abandon and to live for others rather than myself. (Too often we have the mission/organization/family, etc. serve us rather than we serve the mission.) The problems and people we encounter daily are opportunities to apply the gospel to the culture around us as faithful stewards of our places of service, giftedness and potential. Jesus actually meets us in our places of work and service in ways that we cannot see, anticipate or control. It is there in our work that he allows me

to meet those around us in ways that he will determine (in faith) or we will determine (in our own strength). The goal here is to encounter more of God and let him increase as we decrease (not to increase our record before God or even to give us more fulfillment in our work). To let him not just shape our character, but to replace our character with the fruits of the presence of his spirit. To not just have his record theoretically, but instead to trust completely in that record of his by faith that transforms both our character and our actions. Such a faith trusts God in the midst of the hard and mundane, when there is no spotlight, no clear ministry opportunity, when we have to set our agenda aside to take on the interruptions he brings our way

**Exercise: My Agenda and God's Agenda.**

Write down to do list at beginning and end of day. Review that evening and write down what God had you actually do on that day. Write new to do list the next day, repeat the exercise. Reflect on how your To Do list changed during the week. Reflect on failure and success.

Tackle questions of “success” and “failure” here. God’s deepest desire is our growth to maturity in Christ and yet our deepest desires are often for “success through our own efforts” (which is the opposite of servant leadership) or success with my definition of success (pain free, problem free, self-made, self-envisioned and attained).

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## LESSON 8: BEING GOD'S AMBASSADORS

**Big Idea:**

We are sent from and with authority of Christ in all that we do. As ones who had once been separated from God and had a need for someone to introduce Him to them and point out their need for reconciliation with Him, we now live as those who have the experience and know the source of reconciling power, which for us is now a form of worship as it is done for God to the benefit of neighbor. The Bible calls this service of reconciliation to God and for God “ambassadorship.” As Ambassadors we represent God and his kingdom rule. Much like modern day ambassadors we speak with derived authority granted to us because of our king Jesus’ belovedness and extend his offer of forgiveness to others as his spokesmen. We see this reality in the Great Commission when Jesus says that all authority has been given to him, and therefore (as we) go we should make disciples. As we go we reconcile brokenness. As we go we forget our own welfare, but instead think on the extension of God’s kingdom, because we rest in God’s authority and power as we go.

*Ambassadors - Rather than seeing our peers through lenses of competitiveness and judgment the gospel frees us to see them as broken individuals who need Jesus just as we do.*

### **Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm**

Instead of viewing those around me through the lense of competitiveness, I can rest in God's welcome, care, power, God's rule and reign. With gospel glasses I'm better able to see them as God sees them- broken people who need Jesus, just as I once did and still do.

We can stop ourselves when we begin to view our peers with judgment or a competitive mentality, because of the reality of Christ promise to care for us and never forsake us, because of his record on our behalf.

What are some of the sins we all struggle with? Being much more concerned with how I stack up to people, than I am concerned about living in restored relationship to my creator which allows me to reach out to other who don't yet know him. OR Insecurity about position or status leads us to compare ourselves with others (and then competing with them, or looking down at them). We can become hypercompetitive and believe that only one person can win, so I better look out for myself because I don't trust God for that.

What does the Cross have to say about these sins? We live out of the relationship to free ourselves and our approach not just my day but my whole life differently – as sons and daughters with great freedom to be who they were created to be. We have the passive righteousness that frees us of our need to judge and compete.

What does redemption look like for us, because of the Gospel? We seek to bless those we work with and build them up, rather than compete or tear them down. A deep understanding of the gospel helps me have the courage to build relationships with people that I have almost nothing in common with and who I really may not even like.

### **Introduction:**

Scripture says that one of those blessings of daily life is that we get to play a vital part in reconciling people to God. God has entrusted us with both the opportunity for service and the message of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5 says that we are Christ's ambassadors, and that God makes his appeal to others through words and actions that implore those around us to be reconciled to God. The Greek word translated "ambassador" is *presbeuomen*, which along with similarly derived words has been translated into English as elder, ambassador, or (de)legate. In Greek the common use of "elder" is used as "ambassador" for a good reason – the best ambassadors show wisdom and maturity as they represent and act on behalf of their community and king, rather than their own self-interest. In the New Testament context a *presbeuomen* held authority and honor not because of they were, but because who they represented (e.g. the role of an elder in a community) and where they had been sent (the idea of a Legate or Delegate). As *presbeuomen* believers look to Christ as the one who holds all power to act and relies on him to guide all that they do, despite personal cost or even danger. As former rebels who are now redeemed citizens of heaven with Christ's record, God has placed each of us in our life contexts as neighbors, coworkers, students, and family

members with daily opportunities to represent a life reconciled to God, and to point others to his reconciling power.

### **Bible Passages:**

**Look at 2 Corinthians 5:11-21.** Expound of Christ's Ministry of Reconciliation and our part in it. "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.<sup>12</sup> We are not commanding ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.<sup>13</sup> For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.<sup>14</sup> For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;<sup>15</sup> and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. **16** From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.<sup>[b]</sup> The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation;<sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling<sup>[c]</sup> the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.<sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

### **Article:**

Jesus defined neighbor as those who exist in proximity to us, but also in that definition highlights those who in particular who are different than us - the outsider or stranger and even our enemy – individuals who we would naturally notice or embrace. (See Luke 10:33). Examine what it is that gives us as believers power to overcome our natural inclinations to care for those who are like us, rather than outsiders, to truly be *presbeuomen*? Only the gospel has the power to transform us to be people that can go with welcome and peace to neighbor, foreigner, stranger, alien and outsider with boldness, and be able to love with a sense of fearlessness and courage because of who we represent and where they've come from. One of the best examples of a human called by God to go to his enemies as a delegate is the person of Jonah. He is an ambassador of peace, forgiveness and repentance to his enemy. The only thing he wanted God to do to the Ninevites was to judge them. He would rather die than go – when confronted with the choice to do so, he had a bunch of sailors assist in drowning him. He figuratively and perhaps literally had to die to himself in order to go. Just like us, Jonah needed those he was going to, so that he could be saved from himself. He needed to be able to see how hard hearted he was and for God to rescue him from himself.

We will never realize how much of our own selfishness and flesh we operate out of until we are put face to face with enemies, with those who have sinned against us, and God regularly puts strangers and even enemies in our path so that we have to deal with

our hatred, self-righteousness and judgment. God puts outsiders in our lives so that our faith might grow, and we might know more deeply his own love that rescued us when we too were outsiders, strangers, and enemies. The power of the gospel is displayed and lived out when we can embrace and welcome others in the midst of their sin. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says the power of Presbeuomen comes from knowing that sin and rebellion are powerless in the sight of God's deep love of his son. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

**Exercise:**

Make a list of the people who hold a grudge against you. List the most radical thing you could do for each one that would reflect God's love for them. Develop a list of people holding grudges against you; what could you do reach out in love. Possible: list of people you have a "judging/competing" grudge against and where to you need to convicted.

Add a second piece asking them to make a list of people you have been holding a "grudge" against with envy, judgment, coldness etc. because of the comparisons going on internally with the other person. What do they need to receive from the gospel in order to be able to let go of their own issues and then reach out to the other person.

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## LESSON 9: SENT AS GOD'S MESSENGERS

**Big Idea:**

We are sent as missionaries equipped to relate for the sake of the others. Evangelism does not have to be offensive to be effective. No one wants to be that guy. People want to be loved authentically and respected for their point of view. God does the work, he has placed us where we are as people that inhabit the Creation Mandate, Great Commandment and Great Commission, and we just need to be faithful presence that speaks up when others ask for the reason for our hope. In many of the same ways God has entrusted us with relationships, in the lives of those around us. He has confided us with orders to share his message of life and good news as fathers, mothers, friends, neighbors, coworkers. He uses his strength to free us from the kingdom of darkness and to establish us in new lives.

**CoCommissioners - Our daily lives are filled with opportunities to faithfully and winsomely engage those around us who do not know Christ personally with seeds of the truth of the gospel.**

**Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm:**

Evangelizing in our own strength or desire to convert, or guilt over not evangelizing. We already have a relationship – and we connect the message to the relationship for the sake of reconciliation of hearer with God. Not relying on Holy Spirit, and also not

praying for an approach/open door flow out of evangelizing with ourselves in mind, rather than the hearer. God often uses our professional competency (as well as gracious failure and ability to not take ourselves too seriously) to open the doors for us relationally to have deeper conversations.

### **Introduction:**

Here is Joe. Because Joe belongs to Jesus, he's also missionary. To help reach the lost people group in his workplace, God has cleverly disguised Rob as a corporate executive. And while many of these people won't go to church, they will listen to Rob and have deeper spiritual conversations with him, because they already know him and trust him, either relationally or professionally .... We need to train people to look for ways to see themselves like that. What will make this lesson a success is giving lots and lots of good, creative way of sharing seeds of the gospel. Here are some common work situations that can be good sowing opportunities if we can help people make connections. (Opportunities for exposing idols).

- Big success/big failure.
- Personality conflict that damages your position/standing.
- Having to carry out a decision you disagree with.
- Someone being let go/failing.
- Someone being deliberately unhelpful.
- Being asked to do something dishonest.

### **Bible Passage:**

This is what Paul speaks of in Colossians 1:24-26 when he says ‘Now I rejoice in ... the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known.’ Apostles are Co-Missioned, entrusted by God as partners in the gospel, and are confided with the lives of people who do not yet understand the message of truth, lives for him to ‘steward’ his gifts and resources into, people who one day will be part of God’s kingdom. Always be ready to give an answer for the hope that you have.

Work from areas of stated perceived need and build on natural relationships where respect is earned and people ask you for the hope you have, not quick hits to make you feel better about evangelizing as a duty. Maybe use the I Corinthians passage about sowing, watering, harvesting, etc.

### **Article:**

The goal of the chapter is to develop the relational connection to be able to sow wisely and consistently (versus seeing evangelism as preaching righteousness at others or using evangelism to make Christians feel better about upholding their “duty to witness.”) Contrast “Apostolos” relational Evangelism vs, “Packaged” evangelism. Look at how one size fits all is awkward for everybody, and affirm that you should avoid it for good reason. We need to learn a new way to relate to others from where you are and give Biblical Examples of Welcoming People, Relating to People, and Using Words/Story. Look at common failures and how the gospel addresses each of the three: (1) Failure in Motivation, (2) Failure to Welcome, (2) Failure to Connect/Communicate. Encourage

everyone to look around the work/home/school neighborhood and take stock of the relationships they can see from your front/dorm/office door.

Consider using C.S. Lewis quote from his sermon The Weight of Glory:

*“There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors. This does not mean that we are to be perpetually solemn. We must play. But our merriment must be of that kind (and it is, in fact, the merriest kind) which exists between people who have, from the outset, taken each other seriously.”<sup>2</sup>*

When we welcome those around us, we must treat them as their eternal nature demands – to treat them with the dignity, care and grace that correspond with being made in the image of God – and to be treated in the way that we would want to be treated ourselves.

Call people to pray that God would show what he is doing and how he is going before them and placing them in relationships. He has placed us in all our relationships – with both believers and unbelievers – and he is mediating all of them for your good and his glory.

**Exercise:**

Begin Praying for Fellow Students, Neighbors, Peers and / or CoWorkers. Ask God to show you the ways that he sees them - how he has gifted them and created them uniquely. Give thanks for their giftedness, and ask to see opportunities to build relationships. Ask God to show ways that he might be asking you to take the next step(s) relationally.

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## LESSON 10: Sabbath - Repenting of Work and Leisure

**Big Idea:**

How are Work, Leisure and Sabbath related? Especially as westerners, work can always creep in to be the focus unwittingly, so we have to be on our guard about setting aside time, sanctifying time as God's and not our own. If we don't regularly practice setting time aside for God and for relationship with his people, our free time becomes consumed with leisure, which is nothing more than unpaid work and time to amuse ourselves with the resources we stewarded and stored up for ourselves when we were working. While not a bad thing, leisure fills us with busyness in lieu of our callings, apart from God and diverts us from our work. Our lives don't need diversions much as they need regular re-ordering. We don't need more emphasis on a work ethic as much as we do a rest ethic. Sabbath reorders and provides meaning to both work and leisure. Sabbath is the threefold rest of God, Humankind, and Creation – the ultimate goal of

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<sup>2</sup> C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” *Theology*, November, 1941.

salvation and human history in the united new heavens and new earth - as our ultimate rest and home.

***Sabbath- The gospel helps shape our views of Work and Leisure to both be good and gifts from God. Contradictorily work and leisure can also be idols that pull us from God. Sabbath is something completely different than Work and Leisure that changes our perspective to bring both back under the authority of God. As God's people we uniquely fulfill and inhabit his rest in ways others cannot.***

### **Sin/Cross/Redemption Paradigm**

We grow to avoiding God, if we don't regularly pursue him. Because of the Gospel, God is now Lord and friend. We relish time with him and his people, and time with him reorders all other relationships and even to creation and institutions.

### **Introduction:**

In our modern milieu, there are at two ways that Sabbath is corrupted. First we allow our non-Sabbath workday preoccupations crowd out our attention on Sabbath. We can't stop, we can't unplug, we keep working, toiling or if we are able to stop our bodily actions, appetites and functions, our minds will fear and fret. Secondly we treat Sabbath as a day of leisure rather than as a day of rest. In modern society leisure has been defined negatively as the time spent away from work. And the truth is that because of technology we're now always engaged. Connected to never "vacate" our callings and pursue leisure. Many schedule their 'vacations' or experiential travel so tightly and frantically that they must return to work to gain rest and refreshment. Whether at work or in leisure one of the problems we have inherited from our society is that we have been trained to be consumers, people driven primarily by our appetites, rather than God.

### **Bible Passages:**

Look at several Old Testament Passages including the introduction of the Sabbath as a concept in Exodus 20:8-11 where Sabbath is modeled for us by God himself resting. We have a 24/6 God! Examine how Exodus 20:8-11 grounds the Sabbath in Creation and God himself. How is it that when we imitate God, we realize we are not God. Does God need rest? Do we? How does God take the lead and initiate our rest?

Look also at Deuteronomy 5:12-15 where Sabbath is grounded in relationship to neighbor and God's work of redemption for his people. Look at how not resting can place you and others under a yoke of slavery? Think about how not resting minimize God's work of deliverance in our lives.

### **Article:**

Biblical Sabbath is completely different than work and leisure. Leisure and Sabbath both restore, are to be enjoyed and incorporate play and often include relationship. Leisure however does not flow of calling, while Sabbath is uniquely and primarily wrapped up in who we are in relationship to God. Leisure is primarily a selfish activity, while Sabbath is Godwardly or other centered. Leisure can even become a

diversion from Sabbath, rather than a means of experiencing it. It may rejuvenate, but at its core it is not rest, fails to promote work (often greed and over-work that allows us to pursue leisure) rather than rest, and without rest we inflict suffering on ourselves and promote rebellion in our humanity.

Leisure has a tendency to demand more from us than it ever gives, enslaving and tiring us in an endless tide of entertainment and emptiness. If we take a vacation we literally vacate our lives, our responsibilities and callings, and instead of filling them with God and his works, we choose to consume new places and things instead. Leisure on its own keeps us captive to an enslaving perspective on our work. The gospel frees us to have Sabbath, and frees us from enslavement to both leisure and our work.

Sabbath in the Bible has three dimensions. (1) Sabbath is a pattern of relational renewal that breaks up and empowers seasons of God given work. (2) Sabbath encourages enjoyment of God, relationship to others and God's creation - our world. True Sabbath looks forward to our future Sabbath rest where we enjoy the glorification of consummation of all things – where heaven and earth are one and we enjoy the work of heaven. (3) Sabbath is marked by celebration and festivity and unity with God and his people. If we really enjoy a Biblical Sabbath, where we enjoy and experience the presence of God as intense rest, our need for work, leisure, consumption would all be diminished because we simply would see more clearly the ways we have allowed the good to crowd out the best, and in turn actively let the Spirit dethrone the ways that these forces have tried to rule over us.

**Exercise:**

Keep track of time spent in sabbath, work and leisure, as well as your attitudes towards sabbath, work and leisure this week. Daily evaluate your patterns of pursuit of God's voice in prayer, word study/reflection. What was your attitude, what competed, how does the gospel speak into the reality of those attitudes? How did your Sabbath affect (or not affect) both you and your neighbor?

## CHAPTER 4: PROJECT DESIGN

As alluded to earlier in Chapter 1, the project was envisioned to be divided into two significant phases after initial interviews with marketplace and theological veterans had occurred. The first phase as outlined earlier was the development of a Beta Document that became the draft material or ‘strawman’ of a significant workplace theology that we had envisioned would meet the agreed upon criteria as developed in Chapter 3. To review, the curriculum was envisioned to:

- Be written for the introductory level workplace disciple.
- Be systematic in its approach.
- Be Reformed and Grace-Based in its theological stance.
- Be oriented towards a variety of professions (and both male and female genders).
- Be application-orientation towards spiritual dynamics and personal sanctification.

The purpose of the Beta Document was its use as a best efforts draft curriculum that could be run through the second phase of the project: a number of significant research and educational settings within the church.

First, the Beta document would be sent to marketplace and theological veterans. This would be the initial group that was interviewed (5 veterans and 5 pastors) plus an additional couple of fresh eyes – twelve sets in all. The document would then be revised and used with a set of twelve-plus graduate students from a variety of liberal arts backgrounds, both men and women, from the Arts, Sciences as well as Law, Medicine and Technical professional schools. This same document was also used in a church Sunday School setting where it was used among a mixed gender Sunday School

class of white collar and blue collar workers at various stages in their careers some just beginning, all the way through to a few others who were retired for almost a decade.

The document underwent a revision from the two group setting and then the document would be used in two one on one discipleship settings – one blue collar, one white collar where significant personal interaction and subjective research could be undertaken. The material underwent another major revision at that point. This fourth revision would be sent on to four marketplace veterans and four theologians or parachurch workers who understood the challenges of workplace theology and education in the Church. The outcome of this second research and refinement project phase was to be a well refined final publishable document.

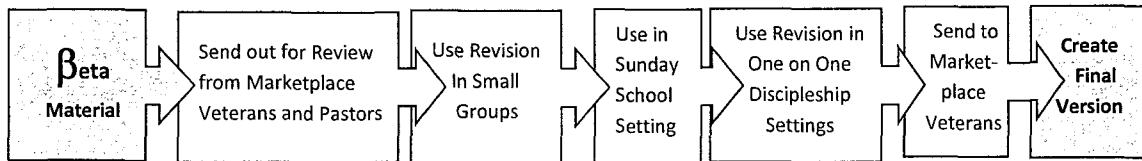


Figure 8: Creation of Final Curriculum

Let's summarize the results of each of these phases as they took place, starting with, and including the development of the Beta Document which was discussed and envisioned in Chapter 1 and content listed in Chapter 3.

**(A) Beta Document** - Significant work took place in creating our Beta Document; a 10 Week series of lessons, called the 'Gospel Centered Life at Work' that met the initial requirements developed in conjunction with World Harvest Mission/Serge. Material was designed to be a significant comprehensive introductory Theology of Work and Daily life for use in an hour long interactive group/individual study

format. The Beta Document created is shown in Appendix A. This resulting document served as the basis of the research project.

**(B) Research Project** - The second major effort was the research portion of the project that focused on different focus groups answering questions about the curriculum that related to the stated learning content and objectives. Where the study content was weak, vague or in need of further refinement to meet the learning objectives, the Beta Material was edited following each research project stage to create a more refined version that honed in on the stated learning goals.

The following learning objective questions were qualitatively applied in Small Group, Sunday School and discipleship settings including focus groups, interviews and questionnaires about the material:

1) Can students explain the Gospel and Gospel dynamics after completing the study?

Specifically can students articulate the basics of the human propensity towards performance and pretense, rather than gospel integration and transformation?

2) Can students articulate a succinct Theology of Work as presented in the study?

Specifically can participants explain the basic study premise that:

- There are three types of work: Creative, Providential, and Redemptive.
- God is using me to transform the world to become his kingdom, and conversely:
- God is using the world to transform me to be more like Christ.

3) Can participants summarize and explain the six 'Bible Snapshots' presented?

4) Participants were polled to make coursework more effective. They were asked:

- Is the format and progression interesting and understandable?
- Is the material touching unnecessarily on theological gripes or controversial areas?
- What might be missing that could make the study better?

As mentioned above, the qualitative research was done in four pragmatic steps or stages. At every stage participants were asked the above questions and encouraged to mark up curriculum in situ – as they were using it and reading it. What was good? What didn't make sense? What had been missed? What needed more clarification or content? What was unnecessarily controversial within their context? Is it memorable (e.g. Can participants explain the gospel and the theology organizational scheme proposed)?

(1) The Beta Study Guide (1.0) document was initially sent out to twelve marketplace veterans for review and comment, each participant was asked to respond specifically on up to three chapters in which they had content experience, passion, or expertise. They were given a month to read, reflect and send comments on the entire material. Their input was invaluable, especially as it related to info that was unnecessarily controversial or overly technical for the average worker. Many of the exercises for each of the Chapters underwent major revision at this stage. Some were switched in relation to their respective lessons, others were simplified for the sake of those who were encountering the subject for the first time.

(2) This second revision (2.0) of the document was taught in (1) a group setting of twelve graduate students and (2) a group of diverse church members interested in the integration of faith and work. The benefit of this phase was that in these contexts we were able to see the material in action. What vocabulary was overly specialized, either within a vocational realm or theologically overly technical or precise at the expense of

understandability? Where did the class/group get overly confused or succumb to leaps in logic built on assumptions in logic? Clarifications and additions to many of the leader notes as well as conceptual disconnects with the audience were identified and revised (the common problem identified in this phase was that many theological concepts were still too abstract for elementary learners). Several lessons were too long and had to be tightened. A variety of spelling, punctuation and grammatical problems were brought to light and corrected. The material was again revised and developed into a new revision.

(3) Third revision (3.0) to be used in a one-on-one discipleship setting with two relatively new believers (one white collar and one blue collar) to test the understandability of content on young and inexperienced believers, since the goal of the study was to appeal to both experienced workplace disciples, as well as new believers and even unbelievers. The benefit of this phase was that the conversation could take as long as we needed. In the one-on-one setting no one was worried about looking foolish, and follow-up questions about comments, questions and concerns could be undertaken with relative ease. Alternatives could be proposed and discussed in real time and conversation extended until these were perfected. The one-on-one interactions highlighted the need to modify the orientation and passages that were used in several of the Bible discussions. In particular early material from the stories of Daniel and Esther were both dropped because of the life experience and Biblical knowledge required as background for these stories. While these are important stories for Biblical literacy, they were not seen as appropriate content for an introductory Bible

Study, because of the density and authorial purposes of the original narrative, which did not condense easily.

(4) The final fourth revision (4.0) that had been created for review by four academicians and four parachurch workers or pastors was now a reality. Based on their review and final input the material went through a final polished revision. This stage was of benefit, because in addition to needing to be understandable by those who would use the document, it also needed to be run by these individuals who would serve as the opinion poll of our target market and decision makers. These two groups represent the gate keepers who would be teaching, training and encouraging others to use and purchase the material. In particular Chapters 9 and 10 underwent major revisions at this stage, because of the significant spectrum of views and controversial theological issues surrounding those views on the topics of the Church and the Sabbath, and how the initial material was seen as unnecessarily controversial to this audience. Proposed revisions and additions from this final round of reviews were used as the final step in developing a final “press ready” version of the material.

To reiterate, at every research and revision stage, groups were pointed to project learning goals so that responses would reflect the objective(s) that the curriculum. A significant number of the comments received at the various stages were editorial in nature and were inserted into various revisions leading up to a final work submitted to publisher’s editor in December of 2013. Substantial (non-editorial/grammatical) comments, calls for revisions, and other significant responses have been included in APPENDIX B.

**(C) Revised / Final Document** - From the plethora of survey responses, multiple material revisions and interactions with editorial staff at New Growth Press a final publishable document was developed. Although both the initial Beta Document and Final Document were both ten chapters long, the chapter order and content had shifted significantly over the course of the project. See APPENDIX C for the content of this completed document, and how it changed from its original format in APPENDIX A.

## CHAPTER 5: OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

### Outcomes

The final version of the document as presented in Appendix C has been well received and endorsed by many, including eight highly experienced and knowledgeable workplace practitioners, theologians and disciples, some of whom assisted significantly in the project development. Use of the material has been tracked on the internet to multiple church Bible Studies, Sunday School Classes, a sermon series, Men's and also Women's groups, throughout the United States (See Appendix D for a listing of current known uses, and also a listing of book 'blurb' endorsements).

It has been exciting to see the results of *The Gospel-Centered Life at Work* in action even in the final preparatory marketplace veteran reviews, small group and classroom interactions and the two one-on-one discipleships that were undertaken as test platforms for the material. As originally intended the material is reaching (and as a result of this research project with real participants) and making a difference with less experienced participants and educating them on a basic understanding of the gospel, a theology of work, and practical ways that they can grow in Christ in their daily callings. The material is usable, memorable and practical, especially in its final form.

I have seen perspectives and attitudes on work, life, and faith change as students and one on one disciples have been transformed in memorable ways, and then put that change into effect in their daily lives. An unbeliever has come to faith, sensitive yet deep spiritual discussions are happening and believers are approaching the ordinariness

of daily life with extraordinary passion. Again, all this has occurred in just the preliminary research and review phases of the project. Let me also share three memorable insights that students have gleaned from the material and how it is changing their daily interactions:

- I guess God is teaching me through not just my successes but my failures as well.
- Maybe I'm thinking about Graduate School all wrong. I think God might want to use me here and now and not just when I finish my schooling.
- I think you have a real winner here Rob.

This final polished version of the material was released on August 18, 2014 as the third addition to the Gospel-Centered series by World Harvest Mission's for-profit publishing arm New Growth Press (World Harvest Mission underwent a name change during the course of the project and is now called Serge). The series so far incorporates the following titles: *The Gospel-Centered Life*, *The Gospel-Centered Community* and now *The Gospel-Centered Life at Work*. In addition to the gratitude felt in the reality of a published and widely disseminated book, the hopeful possibility of impacting a new generation more deeply with the gospel has been a tremendous privilege and perhaps will become the lasting fruit of this project.

All of this work to date and its reception to date has been very satisfying. One marketplace veteran claimed that this was the second best introductory study out there. The first was a biblical theological approach to the topic, rather than systematic. So this is high praise indeed in that regard.

Two items stand out in particular that proceeded providentially, after the initial research phase, but before publication:

First the publisher wanted to condense the material into a nine week study instead of ten, and therefore wanted to shrink two chapters (one on relationships and one on evangelism) into one, and then end in a chapter on Sabbath. To have done so threatened the underlying systematic structure of the book and would have done violence to the proposed three sets of pairings around Creation, Provision, and Redemption that were the undergirding theological construct. After convincing the publisher to maintain the original proposed length, it was realized that this discussion uncovered some opportunities, which we will discuss shortly.

Secondly, in the final round of review, there was great concern about how Sabbath was being presented and that the content presented was unnecessarily negative view of leisure which would turn off a significant portion of our proposed audience. There was a narrow line that needed to be walked in the material between critique, criticism and negativity. The publisher pushed to rewrite several times because of concern over a particular critique. In writing into that palpable tension, I believe that that particular chapter became one of the best in the book, and am grateful for the extra push to get it right.

## Next Steps

There are also several possibilities for next steps, now that the launch excitement and initial push has faded. One of the hardest things about the project was keeping the depth of the book at an elementary level, as every step of the way things were whittled down to a beginner's perspective. Much more could be said and I think should be said to take the gospel content to the next level, to do more theological integration and to also do more work in the Biblical Theology realm, as it relates to each of the systematic subjects that developed.

Let me propose a few possibilities:

- (1) A potential revision of the Gospel Centered Life at work or a book version that is built on short but helpful critiques of those who are using the materials in church men's groups, women's groups, Bible Studies, Sunday School classes and even sermon series. It would be easy to ask: what was clear, what needs improvement, what did folks agree with or innovate on? These would be easy to track and follow through with the use of church website information.
  
- (2) The stories of David and Esther are critical but lengthy examples of work and faith in action. These had to be cut from the book because there was not enough space to develop the stories and the broader systematic topic in the same lesson. This needs to be done for the interested learner in the context of a gospel centered perspective. Some great strides exist in this area in many sources, which can be gleaned for more examples and input. These two stories by themselves could be developed into

standalone books or studies. There are also excellent treatments of Esther and Daniel by Timothy Keller in Redeemer New York's *Living in a Pluralistic Culture*. The story of Esther is repeated and expounded in *Every Good Endeavor* by Timothy Keller with insights from coauthor Katherine Leary Alsdorf. *Job Shadowing Daniel* by Larry Peabody as well as the forthcoming *The Accidental Executive: Lessons on Business, Faith and Calling from the Life of Joseph* are two other great resources for contemporizing Old Testament biblical characters. In thinking about the subject there may also be more narrative figures who are representative snapshots and leaders within the basic workplace theology framework outlined in the Gospel Centered Life at Work (Saul, David, Jonah, Nehemiah, Deborah, etc.) enough to encapsulate a full book of the possibilities.

(3) A second possibility is the role of the imagination and “cultural liturgies” developed by James K. Smith in his series on cultural liturgies, *Imagining the Kingdom* and *Desiring the Kingdom*. Jamie proposes that work cultures – specifically the marketplace, the public square, the university, all develop competing cultural liturgies that allure and promise us deliverance in ways that are counterfeit to the gospel. The gospel has the power to correct and transform these bent ways of relating within these cultures that uniquely skew our view of creation, providence and redemption. A book that could develop the relation between our basic theology of work and these applied contexts is of particular appeal but certainly was beyond the scope of this initial beginner level project.

(4) Thirdly, the whole idea of understanding and relating to culture is of particular importance especially within postmodernism. How as a postmodern do I really carve out arguments that force others to both respect the Christian position and also acknowledge the coherency of argument and tenability of faith, even if they don't agree with particular Christian faith presuppositions.

(5) Fourthly, there is a deep need for a gospel centered understanding or Christian view of leadership. Much has been written on leadership, but a majority of it feels like it is a self-help book or business literature with a spiritual veneer. What are the things that separate a Christian leader from other leaders? How should we involve God and prayer in our decision making? How do I lead from any position in my organization (360 degree leadership)?

Finally the project itself was a Bible Study format which lends itself to two corresponding alternative opportunities:

(1) While this is a great learning format, what about those who need to learn on their own, rather than with a group. A straight book format (as opposed to Bible Study) is appealing and would make a great companion volume to the study if done well. It could be used at home in parallel with the study guide, and can be written at a 200 or 300 level rather than a basic introductory format.

(2) Secondly what if written literature and group bible study is not your primary learning mode/style. It has been suggested that a video based format that retold the main articles in a video based approach could be a big seller and open up a shrinking book buying market.

It is hoped that some of these additional writings and/or video study guides might be great next steps in the creative process and their rudimentary form here could serve as the seedbed for a new project or endeavor.

**APPENDIX A:** BETA Version of *The Gospel-Centered Life at Work*

## PREFACE

This study is about the spiritual dynamics of daily work and life and the process of sanctification we undergo as God's dearly beloved children. Each one of us longs for a deep sense of meaning in our work and a knowledge that our work is valuable, to our neighbors, but also more importantly in the sight of God. We all have experienced that sin frustrates our best efforts in our workplaces and that the circumstances of work can be hard, painful and personally frustrating. In the entanglements of circumstances that are beyond our control, we find ourselves in need of divine guidance. This study is designed to be a tool to help you build a bridge from faith to work, and in turn apply the gospel to the work related aspects of your daily life. (You may have begun this study after completing *The Gospel-Centered Life* by Bob Thune and Will Walker. If not, you might consider doing so before beginning *Gospel-Centered Work*.) Just like *The Gospel-Centered Life*, this study is about the ways we participate in the incarnational reality or "work" of the Trinity in this world.

God oversees every aspect of our lives, yet at the same time we are free to be faithful or faithless in the midst of our circumstances. The truths of the gospel give us a growing awareness that we are far more sinful than we once thought, but at the same time more dearly loved and accepted than we could ever imagine. The good news of God's grace that we bathe in on Sunday gives us the courage to be faithful when we find ourselves faithless Monday through Saturday. It has the power to repent, restore, and reorient us—in other words to sanctify us—to make us more like Jesus. This gospel sanctification process encompasses two synergistic spiritual realities that impact us and the rest of creation in the midst of daily life:

**THE DIVINE DYNAMIC:** God is changing and sanctifying *us* through our work. You and I are being conformed to the likeness of Christ through those around us (co-workers, customers, neighbors, bosses, peers and subordinates, children, etc.) and through the challenges (and even the falleness) of work itself. The good, the bad, the beautiful (and even the ugly) all come through our heavenly Father for our good and his glory as he restores all things. ***The gospel is transforming us through the joys and challenges of daily life.***

**THE HUMAN DYNAMIC:** At the same time, in his ongoing work of restoration, God is using *us*, his people, as *agents* of change to sanctify and transform the world. We are the reflection of God's image, his workmanship, and the messengers of his reconciliation in the places we inhabit as God's people (our homes, workplace, schools, etc.). God calls us to love and impact our neighbors through our daily work. ***God is transforming the neighborhoods of the world with the gospel through us.***

These two gospel dynamics - the divine and the human - are the foundational realities by which our daily work becomes a way to glorify God and better love our neighbors. In this study we want to look at what the gospel has to say about our workplaces and the fallen realities of daily work, then we'll apply these foundational gospel dynamics to six Biblical snapshots that capture how God partners with his people to transform the world with the gospel.

## INTRODUCTION

**LEADERS NOTE:** You can ask your group members to read this before or after your first meeting or you can read it together. Whenever you do it, be sure to impress on everyone that they have a “calling” or vocation.

The gospel is constantly bearing fruit and growing (Colossians 1:16) in every sphere of our lives—in our home, work, leisure and relationships. This is true for us as individuals and as communities of believers in the institutions where Christ has placed us. Everything we do is being brought into the light and holiness of God’s glory as the gospel changes us (1 Corinthians 10:31). God invites us to live every part of our lives as worship and to rely on his strength rather than our own (Philippians 4:13).

Letting the gospel transform our work and daily life is a primary way believers participate in God’s work in this world. The joys and challenges of daily life push believers towards God, where in dependence we ask him to reveal his purposes and to guide and empower us as we respond to the circumstances of daily life. As we ask, God reminds us that we are his beloved children and encourages us to live by faith as unique reflections of Christ before a watching world. No matter how marred or tarnished our reflection might actually be, the gospel allows us to celebrate who we are in Christ, and frees us to let that reflection be further refined and polished by Christ.

The way we reflect God’s character in the work we do will take many forms over the course of our lives. One need not report to an office, have a boss, or even receive a paycheck to be at “work.” For the believer, work from a biblical point of view is whatever activity we pursue in the sight of God, for the glory of God, to the benefit of others. As children, we take on the vocation of learner to become students and apprentices when we enter into the world of work. From there we’ll grow in responsibility to take care of our own household, seek a job, or pursue a career. Perhaps we’ll move from paid work to ‘volunteering’ or a second unpaid career. Regardless of how old we are or what we do, if we’re believers, we come to see our daily activities as a ‘Calling’ or *vocation* given by God to honor and obey him in all that we do.

To honor God in our work is never straightforward. At times we may feel that God moves through our words and actions - that he clearly directs every detail of our day, and that we are empowered by his Spirit. At other times, we might have great intentions, but our own sin and the sin of those around us complicate almost every interaction of our day. We all need to be reminded of the power and reality of the gospel in our work and our lives.

- The gospel is available and applicable at the times when we clearly see the ways people sin against one another, but have no idea of what God is calling us to as children who bear his image and are called to imitate his ways.
- The gospel is available and applicable when work is toilsome, hard and meaningless, because only the Spirit can reveal, enlivens and give meaning to our circumstances, allowing us to be his servants to love and serve selflessly.

- The gospel is available and applicable when we don't know how to interact with a coworker, boss, client, or subordinate because the gospel message is powerful enough to change us and give us insight into other's needs as God's ambassadors.
- We need to be reminded that we have access to the gospel which proclaims forgiveness from sin, as well as the availability of the power of the Spirit to understand how to apply the gospel to our particular circumstances, so that God might be glorified in all things.

In this study we'll examine these and other ways the early church described what it is to live by faith, to honor God and to live out the gospel in daily life and the work we're called to. The Bible described the role of the believer in the world to be akin to being ***Image-bearers and Imitators, Bond-servants and Stewards, Ambassadors and Messengers.*** All of these roles have relevance to the work we do, wherever we do it. We'll consider all of these concepts in their first century context to get a fuller sense of how the bible can both encourage us and help us apply our faith to the work we do every day.

# LESSON 1

## THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE: GOD REALIGNS US TO WORK

### BIG IDEA

For many of us, work is merely a set of things we must do—jobs and activities that can be stressful, unfulfilling, and demanding, and seem to have little to do with God. But God has something better in mind for his children. A gospel-centered understanding of work transforms our perspective and motives so that work goes from being a set of things we do for survival to become our *vocation*, a calling from our Savior to love, serve and follow him. Seeing our work as a vocation given to us by God makes work one of the primary ways we respond to God in gratitude for all he has done for us through Jesus. It's also a primary way we participate in God's purposes as we bring healing, hope, and gospel witness to a broken world.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Bible Conversation: | Read and talk about the passages(s)                        |
| Article:            | <i>A Deeper Understanding of Vocation</i>                  |
| Discussion:         | Process <i>A Deeper Understanding of Vocation</i> together |
| Home Exercise:      | <i>Extraordinary Purposes in Ordinary Work</i>             |
| Wrap Up:            | Final thoughts and prayer                                  |

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

We are focusing on three big questions in this lesson.

- (1) What is our functional set of beliefs (not the spiritual “right” answer, but what we really think) as we approach work and daily life?
- (2) What were work and life designed by God to look like?
- (3) How does the gospel speak into the gap between these two realities (1 and 2)? The questions and Bible passages we explore together will highlight the differences between our actual beliefs and what God intends.

They also point to our need for the Holy Spirit to:

- continually refocus us on God as we go about our work,
- fill us with faith to trust and depend on him, and
- grow us in love for God and others as we go about our daily callings.

### SETUP

It can be hard to see our life as a seamless, interwoven fabric that integrates our faith with the work God has called us to do. Between society's distrust of faith in the marketplace and our own brokenness, we are tempted to pull these things—the work God has prepared for us and our personal relationship with him—apart. Although we may want to live for Christ in everything we do, our faith is often confined to the private sphere of life and our work doesn't reflect our faith in Christ. Instead it simply comes to reflect our own goals, desires, and methods for getting what we want out of our work. We don't even know how to ask, “How does my faith in Christ connect with what I'm doing?”

When that happens, work starts to take on a role in our lives it was never intended to have. At those times work can feel like a burden, something we simply "have to do" in order to survive. At other times it can become the center of our lives and a false but powerful source of identity. But neither of these reflects a gospel-centered understanding of work, which acknowledges that our work was distorted by the fall, but has been made new in Christ as a way to live out our calling from God. If our work attitude has moved towards 'Just Surviving' we might end up looking to leisure as a deliverance from the daily grind of work ("I'm working for the weekend. I just can't wait until I'm retired.") If we have embraced work as a false 'Functional Center' of life that temporarily delivers gratification without God ("I'm too busy to do anything else. I'll spend time with my family and church when I finish this project. What I do is who I am.") This first lesson digs deeper into assumptions like these that minimize the gospel and its impact on our work lives, as well as what it is to be called into partnership with God in our daily life.

ASK:     What excites you about what you do every day?  
          What brings you joy at work/school/home?

ASK:     What things drive you crazy about life at work/school/home?  
          Why do you do what you do at work/school/home?

ASK:     Would you take on your current role if you didn't have to?  
          If you didn't need a paycheck to make ends meet, what would you do?

Let's look at some Bible passages that deal with the good and bad in our work.

READ:    The first passages we want to look at are Genesis 1:26-31, Genesis 2:15, and Genesis 3:17-24.

ASK:     What does this passage say about God's relationship to us?  
          What does this passage say about how we respond to God?

LEADER'S NOTE: We're primarily looking for answers about the kind or types of work that God is engaged in here. In these passages we see that God's work reflects his character. He creates by making something out of nothing, he sustains all things that he has made, and he comes to redeem that which has been broken. We also see that we've been created to bear his image and that we are called to reflect his character. He models both work and rest for us as created beings who enjoy relationship with him, imitate and learn from him. Life before humanity's fall into sin is simple, good and relational. God created a garden for our provision and enjoyment, to give us legitimate, dignifying work in partnership with him while we met our own needs. God also provided us with boundaries (rest and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) for our work

The passages that deal with the fall tell us that even after we sin, God provides for us. They also show that we tend to ignore God's boundaries and warnings, and often avoid repentance without God's prodding. Finally the passages also show that even in the midst of toil, sweat and pain of our work today, we have God's imprint on us in our underlying desire for relationship with our creator and in the purposes and meaning we seek in our work.

READ: The last passage we want to look at is Romans 8:11-21.

ASK:     What does this passage say about God's relationship to us?  
          What does this passage say about how we respond to God?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** God is making all things new in Christ, starting with the new life he gives us and the promise of life in the Spirit. We respond to God by giving him our whole lives in love and service. God adopts us and gives us his Spirit. We respond by crying out to him—“*Abba Father*.” God makes us heirs; we respond by sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. God is glorifying us alongside Jesus. We eagerly long for our ultimate glorification because it is our freedom and a return to the way life was in the garden. Along with us, the whole creation eagerly awaits a coming renewal and restoration by God.

**TRANSITION TO ARTICLE:** These passages give us a biblical understanding of God's calling to follow him in all spheres of life, including the work he gives us. God's design is for men and women to know themselves as partners in his continuing work in the world. Through our work and by his power, even now God is redeeming, sustaining and re-creating all things. To get a fuller understanding of this reality, let's read an article together and then go through some discussion questions.

**TURN TO ARTICLE: *A Deeper Understanding of Vocation*.**  
Read aloud, taking turns at the breaks between paragraphs.

**LEADER'S NOTE:** We're not looking for terribly profound answers to the following questions; instead we want the group to draw one or two meaningful ideas from this lesson. Hopefully this lesson will move group members from cynicism about the fallenness and toil of work to recognition that work is a gift from God with a potential to be used for good.

## DISCUSSION

1. Let's think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: How does the gospel drive this new way of viewing work?

ASK: How does the gospel correct some of the misguided ways we might have come to understand our work?

2. Let's make these ideas a little more personal.

ASK: How might making the gospel the functional center of your life change the way you view your work?

**EXERCISE:** We've begun exploring our need to exchange misguided views of work for ones that are better aligned with God's Word and the gospel. ***Extraordinary Purposes in Ordinary Work*** helps us see simple ways we participate in God's work that may have been obscured by our cultural assumptions. In this exercise, you'll see how everyday work parallels God's work of Creation, Provision and Redemption in the world.

**TURN TO the *Extraordinary Purposes in Ordinary Work* exercise.** If there is time, read through the exercise and have the group brainstorm some ideas to get started.

**WRAP UP:** Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE: A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF VOCATION

A friend who just lost his job sits across the table from me with tears in his eyes. "I know I have a purpose," he says. "More than anything I need to know that what I do matters and that I'm doing what God wants me to do."

A young mom shares with her friends at playgroup, "I just wasn't prepared for the drudgery and exhaustion of caring for a baby. I love her so much, but how do you cope with doing the same thing day after day on little or no sleep? I don't know how I'm going to keep going."

"My work is so stressful," a hard-working executive confesses. "I have so many responsibilities that it's hard to think about anything else. Even when I'm home I'm connected to work by email. I know my family wishes I wasn't always 'checking in,' but they don't understand what is expected of me. I don't even have the time to think about God and what he wants. That seems like just one more thing to do."

"I'm trying to get all my schoolwork done, but it's hard to get motivated," a college student says. "Everyone around me is partying, and I have no idea if I'll get a job when I graduate. So usually I look for the fun I can have today. I'm a Christian, but I just don't know how that connects to life right now. Maybe I'll work on that later."

"Homeschooling my children was so much work, but I loved doing it," a mom said. "But now I'm wondering if it was worth it. My oldest son doesn't want to go to church or do anything. What was all that effort for?"

How about you? Most likely you also have questions about the meaning, significance, and motivation for what you do. We all feel the desire for meaningful work—to have what we do make a difference—yet we also feel the gap between the realities of our daily work and our lives as Christians.

We wonder:

- Am I doing the right thing?
- What should I do with the rest of my life?
- My work is unpaid; does that mean it's not important?
- Why is work so stressful?
- What if I lose my job? Who will provide for my family?
- Why do I get so afraid when I make a mistake at work?
- Is it possible to go to work and not get involved in gossip and politics?
- Am I a good parent?
- Is what I'm doing making a difference?

Notice that these questions are not just about work. They are spiritual questions about faith, meaning, significance, identity, and the struggle with sin. Work and faith: the struggle to bring these two things together is as old as the fall of humanity itself. Ever since Adam and Eve turned from God and left the garden of Eden, they experienced God's good gifts of work, childbirth, and relationships as broken and hard. We know this isn't the way it's meant to be, but we wonder how (and if) our lives can be made whole again.

In Genesis 1 and 2, we see God at work, creating, separating, filling, examining, and declaring all things good. God's intent was for human life to bind together work, family, personal spirituality, and worship into a beautiful and seamless tapestry. The need to apply faith to work wasn't necessary before the fall, since Adam and Eve walked with God in a perfect relationship with him, each other, and creation. One great day in the future, the effects of the fall will finally come to an end. We will see the end result of Christ's coming. All of life will be made new. Heaven will come to earth and sin, sorrow, suffering, and brokenness will be banished. Life in its fullest sense will be restored through his completed work.

Right now we live "in between." But, though life is still broken, something new has happened. God has come to earth to be with his people. Jesus, the man from Galilee, God with us, has purchased healing and wholeness for us by his death on the cross. When we come to him in faith and repentance, our sins are forgiven and we are given the gift of eternal life and a whole new life right now. The power that raised Christ from the dead is now in our life, working to remake us and everything we do.<sup>1</sup>

Because of all these gospel realities, even the simplest tasks we perform by faith in response to God become acts of worship that reflect his character and imitate his ways. This is the new vocation of those who live by faith. The sixteenth century Christian reformer Martin Luther once said:

When a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other [menial] task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool, though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith, are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools.<sup>2</sup>

Do you see how living by faith can transform all of life and even our idea of what vocation means? By faith we depend on Jesus to walk with us and we rely on his Spirit to guide us, so that our relationship with Christ enlivens the familiar, toilsome, and sometimes broken aspects of daily life. We find that we can actively participate in God's work where he has called us right now. Whatever situation we are in—student, dishwasher, waitress, stay-at-home mom, working mom, executive, office staff, church staff, small business owner, doctor, plumber, artist, contractor—we do all things with Christ, because of him, and with the help of his Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Our work is transformed by our relationship with Christ from something we do to fulfill our own goals and desires into something much grander and more significant. Now all our work has become kingdom work—work done in the service of the King for his purposes. This is what gives meaning and significance to the most boring and menial of tasks. Christ called us to live for him; he prepared good works for us to step into, and as we do so by

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 1.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, Martin. Tract: The Estate of Marriage, 1522 Translated in *Luther's Works* Volume 45, Pg. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 4:13

faith, we realize that all we do is in his hands as well.<sup>4</sup> This is what vocation means for those who know Jesus. It's not something relegated to a narrow definition of life. His righteousness covers all of our work, transforming everything we do in every part of our lives.

This idea of partnering with God through your vocation may not be the way you naturally think about your life. It's difficult to change your thinking and even harder to live out the change. It's easy to get caught up in the perspectives of our world. Life can feel toilsome when we don't see that God is sustaining the world and advancing his kingdom through us, his children. Work can also become something we hope will provide things we think God cannot or will not give us—what the Bible calls an idol. All too often, when we pursue work apart from God, we are secretly trying to find meaning and personal fulfillment apart from our relationship with Christ. This is because we don't really believe that Christ alone can truly satisfy us. When that happens, work becomes a trap where we are either proud of what we have accomplished or discouraged by our mistakes and lack of accomplishments.

Our tendency will always be to either minimize God's presence in our work or to elevate our own efforts and accomplishments apart from God. In light of these difficulties and so many more, it is vital to see that a believer's work is a partnership with Jesus, the One who has already achieved success on our behalf and offers mercy and grace in every struggle.<sup>5</sup> We need to apply the truths of the gospel every day if we are to live out our vocation in this broken world. These truths include:

- Daily forgiveness: we need to ask for the forgiveness Jesus purchased on the cross for the ways we live for our own work instead of God's purposes (1 John 1:9–10).
- Daily help from the Spirit: We need to ask the Spirit to help us and change us so that we live for God as partners in his kingdom (Luke 11:13).
- Resurrection power: In the midst of what might feel like a daily grind, we have to ask for the power that raised Christ from the dead to give us strength and help (Ephesians 1:15–23).
- Daily faith perspective: We need God to help us see life from his perspective instead of our own (Ephesians 2:8).
- God's power and control: When work goes badly wrong, when we fail, when others fail, we need to remember that God has the final word in everything. All things work for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes (Romans 8:28).

Meaningful work is not all there is to life, but a meaningful life is not possible without the knowledge that God is at work, using our everyday work for his extraordinary purposes. As we work, we carry out God's purposes in a world that does not know his presence or the message of his grace. Our work is one of the main ways God tempers our character to become more like Christ and, at the same time, carries out his plan of redemption for the world. As we make the gospel the true center of our work, God will use us in his kingdom and use our work struggles to make us more like him every day.

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<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:8-10

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 4:14-16

# EXERCISE

## EXTRAORDINARY PURPOSES IN ORDINARY WORK

This exercise is designed to help you think about your work in a new way—as a partnership with God. God does three amazing things in this world: he makes something out of nothing (creation); he stays in charge of everything he has made (providence), and he restores what's broken (redemption).

As you partner with God in your work, you are also creating, providing, and redeeming. Sometimes it's easy to miss this, so this exercise will give you a chance to think about how different aspects of your abilities and work reflect your partnership with God. Before you begin, take a moment to think about how your work fits into these three categories of God's work:

- Creative work (work such as designing, development and artistic endeavors)
- Providing work (production and distribution of services or goods for others' benefit)
- Redemptive work (fixing brokenness, relieving toil and removing pain)

Note: It's okay if you don't fill in every answer or if you just fill in one of the three aspects. To get you started, we've given examples from different jobs and suggested how they might connect to the three aspects. The list isn't exhaustive, but it can help you think of ways that your work is connected to God's work.

### EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE ASPECTS

"I enjoy creating products, methods, services or ideas." (e. g. engineer, chemist, teacher, author, student)  
"I construct new spaces or organizations." (e. g. contractor, electrician, homeowner, plumber, engineer)  
"I like to find ways to connect people who wouldn't normally hang out." (e. g. cruise director, bartender)  
"I help give birth to people, ideas or beauty." (e. g. parent, artist, musician, pastor, writer, poet)  
"I look for creative ways to talk about Jesus with those around me." (e. g. anyone)  
"I envision roles for other people that they themselves don't see yet." (e. g. educator, manager, trainer)

### EXAMPLES OF REDEMPTIVE ASPECTS

"I help physically, spiritually or psychologically broken people." (e. g. counselor, HR specialist)  
"I help to reconcile broken relationships." (e. g. friend, guidance counselor, labor specialist)  
"I clean, fix, repair things or people affected by the fall." (e. g. HVAC repair, mechanic, handyman)  
"I troubleshoot to avoid potential problems." (e. g. engineer, network administrator, programmer)  
"I fight or prevent criminal activity and promote ethical behavior." (e. g. judge, lawyer, watchman)  
"I assist and give hope to people in personal or natural disasters." (e. g. fireman, policeman, military)

### EXAMPLES OF PROVIDING ASPECTS

"I assist people in finding shelter that meets the needs of their household." (e.g. social worker, realtor)  
"I help in the harvesting and/or restoration of natural resources." (e.g. farmer, biochemist, engineer)  
"I assist in providing the efficient use of a utility." (e. g . utility worker for water, electric, gas, etc.)  
"I help people govern themselves in a manner that promotes flourishing." (e. g. politician, activist)  
"I educate people and provide a place for community and learning." (e. g. educator, parent)  
"I help others find space (time or place) to pursue rest and leisure." (e. g. artist, musician, park ranger)

In the spaces below, take a few minutes to jot down how your work reflects aspects of God's work.

Creative Aspects

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

**CREATION**

A gospel-centered  
understanding of life  
transforms work to become  
vocation - a primary way  
we respond to God and  
follow Christ in a  
broken world.

**PROVISION**

Redemptive Aspects

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

**REDEMPTION**

Providential Aspects

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)

**LEADER'S NOTES:** If you do this as a group exercise (rather than take-home), after everyone has had time to think about their answers, encourage people to share their insights with the group.

## LESSON 2

### TRANSFORMATION: GOD USES WORK TO CHANGE US

#### BIG IDEA

Work was intended to be a good thing, but after the fall it became one of the main places where our sin and brokenness show up. However, even in their brokenness, our workplaces are not beyond God's care and purpose. He is more than able to use the fallen things in life to shape us into more mature followers of Christ. A gospel-centered understanding of work elevates life from a daily grind to holy ground, where God deepens our relationship to him, to one another and to creation, as we partner with him in his plans and purposes.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Bible Conversation: | Read and talk about the passages(s)                 |
| Article:            | <i>The Daily Grind</i>                              |
| Discussion:         | Process concepts of <i>The Daily Grind</i> together |
| Home Exercise:      | <i>How Work Makes Us More Like Christ</i>           |
| Wrap Up:            | Final thoughts and prayer                           |

#### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Since we spend so much time working (at school, marketplace, home, etc.) the workplace is not just the primary setting for our vocational partnership with God; it's also a significant place for our personal gospel transformation. We work with God to impact our work cultures for his glory; perhaps even more importantly, there is a parallel reality to our work—God loves us and is making us more like Christ through our daily life and work. When our work is separated from the gospel, it can become empty of meaning and full of toil. But when viewed through the lens of the gospel, our daily work can draw us to rely on Christ in greater ways.

#### SETUP

At breakfast one morning, my friend Charlie confided in me, "My work is awful. I go there every day but I just want to quit because . . ." Maybe you know how you would finish Charlie's statement! As we discussed last time, work was designed as part of God's good creation, an honorable means of provision for humanity and a way for us to assist in the stewardship of creation. Like every other aspect of our lives, sin has strangely twisted our relationship to work to give it the dual capacity to be filled with toil and trouble as well as joy and beauty. Too often our temptation is to retreat in the face of such affliction, looking for ways to seclude ourselves from the trouble and temptation of the world. Although this is a natural defense mechanism, these impulses can short-circuit the plans that God may have for us. He is always growing us in ways that encourage us to rely on him more deeply by faith, even in the midst of trials, temptations and suffering. He desires that we call out to him in our distress, so that he might meet us in ways that spiritually transform us and our workplaces in our times of trouble.

First, consider my friend Charlie's question.

"My work is awful. I go there every day but just want to quit because . . ."

ASK: If you were sharing that statement with a trusted friend, how would you complete the thought in one sentence?

Let's consider a gospel perspective on suffering and persevering in times of trial.

ASK: Why might Paul be uniquely qualified to talk about God's care in times of trial and testing? What parts of Paul's story help us understand his qualifications?

LEADER'S NOTE: Paul underwent trial and imprisonment for his belief in the gospel. He also spoke of his thorn in the flesh and his former record apart from the gospel. He knew what it was to be delivered and what it is to suffer.

Let's see what Paul says to the churches in Rome and Corinth about this topic.

READ: Romans 8:18-21

READ: 1 Corinthians 10:13

ASK: What benefits does Paul suggest come through suffering and testing?

ASK: How is God present with us during these times?

LEADER'S NOTE:

Because periods of trial and testing in life are universal, it is natural for participants to reference personal times of trial. Affirm any stated ideas if they are aligned with Paul's thoughts in the passage, but then encourage them towards the benefits Paul lists in Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 10. Here's some ideas:

- 1) Suffering increases our longing for creation to be released from bondage and the desire for greater freedom from sin for us as God's children.
- 2) Temptations offer us a chance to see God's faithfulness in our time of need.
- 3) Resisting temptation strengthens our reliance and endurance on him as the provider of our deliverance in times of trial.

Now let's consider what James says about the importance of both our beliefs and actions in times of trial and temptation.

READ: James 1:2-12

ASK: What are three things James says about the value of trials and temptations?

Finally, consider your own testing and refining.

ASK: How have you found these principles to be relevant in your own life?

TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: We want to think more deeply about our personal hardships as we read about the suffering and toil present in daily life. Try to think of how personal

experiences of trial, temptation, toil and suffering might relate to the categories developed in ***The Daily Grind Article*** that we'll read together.

TURN TO: ***The Daily Grind*** article in your participants guide. Read aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

## DISCUSSION

### LEADER'S NOTE:

Like last time, profound answers aren't critical here. We want folks to track with the article and take one or two nuggets home with them, especially as it relates to God's presence and purposes being worked out even in times of trouble. God's love for us is never thwarted by sin. Likewise he is always caring and providing for us – even in times of temptation or trial. For this reason we can both resist and grieve suffering as hardship, but also welcome it because it has been sifted through God's hands to help us rely on his strength by faith in deeper ways.

Let's think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: What are some of your initial thoughts about this article?

ASK: Do you believe that God puts us in situations of toil, trial and testing?

Let's make these ideas a little more personal.

ASK: Where has God placed you in situations of toil, trial or testing?

ASK: Have you been more likely to resist or to welcome hardship in your life?

ASK: Why might both resisting AND welcoming hardship be important aspects for us as people who proclaim the gospel?

HOME EXERCISE: We're exploring how God puts us in situations that transform our character by aligning us with his character and purposes *and* exposing our motivations. ***How Work Makes Us More Like Christ*** helps us assess ways that our perspective on work might be clouded by wrong and idolatrous motivations rather than those that are informed by the gospel.

TURN TO: *copies of How Work Makes Us More Like Christ*. Review the activity with the group and encourage participants to work on the exercise this coming week.

WRAP UP: Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

# THE DAILY GRIND

It would be crazy to think that *all* of the work we do is exciting, fulfilling, or even good for us. As we saw last time, we were made *to* work, but not *for* work. We were made for God. As part of God's good creation, work was intended to bless us and to glorify God. But now, after the fall, these positive aspects of work are a lot harder to see. The fallen nature of work is much easier to relate to. Just as we can look for the three aspects of work's inherent goodness in our daily work (the creative, providential and redemptive) there are also three fallen aspects to our work. In Genesis 3 we see that our broken relationship with God has brought about "toil" or meaninglessness to our work; our failure in relationships has created a selfish "rule" or bent aspect to all the things we do; and the brokenness and decay of creation has produced "futility" or a fruitless aspect to work as we try to be productive.

Everything—including the way we think about and perform in our jobs—is affected by our broken relationship with God. And so when we as fallen, finite beings try to manufacture our own purposes for work, inevitably our purposes lack true meaning and therefore feel futile. Because our relationships to one another are also broken, our default mode is selfishness, which readily turns relationships and the fruits of our labors towards competition and conflict. This further breaks relationships between friends, neighbors and colleagues in our workplaces, schools and homes. Finally, instead of creation naturally producing fruit, even the "ground" given to us tends towards fruitlessness and futility: thorns, thistles, death and decay are all too prevalent parts of the harvest of our work. Apart from the gospel, work creates a downward spiral of these three broken aspects, where MEANINGLESSNESS in life produces SELFISHNESS in our hearts, which leads to FRUITLESSNESS in our work.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon describes these meaningless, selfish and fruitless aspects of life that flow out of our separation from God as a "chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 4:4). When we no longer trust God to provide for us, we selfishly start to look out for "Number One." The result is what we call *Functional Idolatry*. We tend to look to things to give us what we think God either cannot or will not give us. Money becomes our first love rather than God. We can all too easily pursue power and influence at the expense of others. Solomon says that our pursuit of life outside of God's purposes can become so pervasive and subtle that even our desires for greater skill and education can spring from envying our neighbor. Even creation becomes something we use for our own selfish ends, instead of a gift we steward for the sake of others. At the root of it all is the functional idolatry that springs from working for self-approval rather than living life under the smile of God.

When we disconnect God from our work, we all experience how selfish appetites and self-protective attitudes begin to creep in to rule our thoughts and actions:

- The private owners of your company put pressure on you - one of the middle managers – to reduce labor costs. They want you to hire more part time workers to increase their profits without letting employees participate in the reward of a streamlined operation. How should you respond?

- Your co-workers have developed a scheme to 'pad' their time sheets with hours that they haven't worked and then cover their work for one another, while you work and submit your actual hours. You're not sure what a loving response might look like?
- You've been asked to develop a strategy to maximize profits for a new drug being launched around the world. You know that in some countries people desperately need the medicine but can't afford it even though producing the medicine is very inexpensive. What impact can you have?
- You see a new mom and dad pushing their only child to succeed. The child has grown more anxious in the time that you've known them. As a teacher you wonder if they are viewing their child's success as a source of their own worth and fulfillment, and how to help their family?
- A salesman who you work with is so motivated by fear of financial security that they have lied, gossiped and undermined competitors to get ahead and 'steal' business - even though they know they can never deliver on the promises they have made. You wonder what a good response might be?

In addition to your own personal transformation to not respond selfishly or in self protective ways, you realize that we all are also in desperate need of outside intervention in our work circumstances. We need God to come and empower us in both our own personal transformation, as well as for him to empower the cultural change we need to be in the situations where he has placed us.

It's also easy to see the fruitlessness and harm that can proceed from sin-damaged ideas of work. What if everyone in the previous circumstances was silent? Who could potentially suffer? Who would be glorified? The question Solomon asks still rings true: "What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest" (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23). There are those nagging doubts that wake us up in the small hours of the morning. We count on others, only to have them disappoint or betray us. We work hard but are overlooked, or circumstances arise that keep us from getting ahead. It doesn't matter who you are or what you do—executive, student, missionary, mother, or factory worker—the fruit of your labor—your success—is not enough to sustain your work. But it doesn't have to be this way. Because God is a Father who loves his children, when our work becomes paralyzingly or overwhelmingly important to us, God uses our struggles to bring us back to him.

Our work was never intended to satisfy us in the ways God can, so when we pursue our work apart from him, sooner or later it *will* feel empty. That emptiness is one of God's gifts—a reminder that God, and God alone, is big enough and strong enough to be the source of our comfort, security, success, and acceptance. Our desperation can often be the motivation to respond to God's tender, loving and steadfast invitation to a lifestyle of repentance and faith that reorients our hearts and lives more towards the truth of the gospel. When we cry out to God in our powerlessness, anger at circumstances, with honesty about our feelings of fear and anxiety, we become open to the change and transformation that God has for us. There in our openness to God and his work, he reveals the idols present in our lives and shows us paths of repentance, as well as places where his Spirit is already at work in our hearts and circumstances.

The good news is that we don't have to be stuck in our meaninglessness, selfishness, and despair. We can relate to God differently because of what Jesus has done. In him, we come to God as beloved sons and daughters. In him we have hope for deliverance from the cycle of despair. The gospel that is at work in our hearts to redeem, reclaim and transform us is the same gospel at work in the world to see broken things made new. The good news of the gospel doesn't mean that we should ignore, overlook or live in fear of the sin that is present in our workplaces, homes, schools and hearts. Instead it means that we have great freedom to move deeper into those places of brokenness by the power of the Spirit, with God's resources rather than relying on ourselves. God is both at work in us to see our lives transformed and at work through us to engage the world with the truth of the gospel.

Far from needing to fear of getting involved in situations or trial and temptation and the possible negative consequences of responding to the fallen circumstances of our workplaces (broken relationships, false product claims, posturing and posing out of fear and envy, etc.), in the gospel those circumstances become the context in which God works out his plan of salvation in us and through us. Even when we face conflict, dissatisfaction, negative consequence or even physical and emotional pain in our work, we can be sure that God is present and using these things to shape us more into the likeness of Christ. The Bible tells us that God is at work in all things, refining us to transform and strengthen our character.<sup>6</sup>

- The truth of the gospel gives the manager who is under pressure to increase profits, knowledge of what it is to have the freedom to ask, "Might there be a better way to run a business that respects and cares for employees?", knowing that God will provide regardless of the outcome of the conversation.
- The gospel produces enough humility in the employee who works with coworkers who are padding their time sheets, to now come alongside them to confront their actions, knowing that more important than having smooth working relationships is the others need for the gospel and knowledge of the righteousness that comes from knowing Jesus.
- The gospel encourages philosophical creativity for the marketing executive who wonders if there might be a way to care for folks in need to develop a strategy built in part on giving away medicine to those who least can afford it, by setting profit aside for the sake of goodwill and increased brand loyalty.
- The gospel breaks down attitudes of self protection in the teacher who knows personally the pressures of children, so that after school hours she is free to strike up a conversation with parents about some alternative 'fun' assignments to help their child work through what freedom from being defined by grades might look like.
- The gospel transforms and reminds the salesman of the pressures that he faced early in his career, so that he asks to come alongside and mentor a younger salesperson who is so motivated by fear of financial security that they have lied, and falsely represented competitors.

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<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 8:16, II Corinthians 1:8-11

The truth of the gospel is always powerful enough to penetrate our self protective thinking and false dichotomies to produce repentance and make room for the power and work of the Spirit in our lives.

In Romans 8:20-30 Paul says that God is allowing, not just you and me, but the whole of creation to be frustrated by sin—to be so affected by sin that we all feel the toil and know the pain that comes from sin—in the hope that our needy state would push us towards Christ, so that we would know the true freedom that he gives freely to us as children of God. At the point of our deep weakness—in our futility and despair—the Spirit can help us cry out for help from our heavenly Daddy to intervene in the things beyond our control. With “groaning too deep for words,” we’re reminded that even in hard circumstances, God is working things together for our good and our eventual glorification with Jesus. A life of ease and leisure is not an indicator of God’s presence. The Bible says the opposite—that trials and trouble are indicators of God’s faithful presence and his deep love for us.<sup>7</sup> First Peter 1:7 says that although it is okay to have worldly grief over various trials, we should also rejoice because trials test the genuineness of our faith and refine us while bringing praise, glory and honor to Christ.

We can and should be frustrated, disappointed, and even angered by the ways sin has broken everything (the loss of a job for a righteous decision, broken relationships, credit for your good work going to someone else, financial rewards that fail to materialize, posturing and posing by others out of fear and envy, etc.). But it is not okay to accept things as they are. At the moment of our weakness, the Spirit stands ready to do more than we can do in our own strength. We must make room for him and in repentance and faith hold to God’s gospel promises to us. Because of the gospel, work is no longer a burden we must bear alone. Instead, it is a burden shared, borne and lifted by Jesus, an opportunity to experience God’s love more deeply and to be transformed in and through the struggles, challenges and disappointment of work. All this happens in the power of the Spirit and in light of the truth of the gospel.

As God grows us, the places of brokenness and despair in which God has placed us become places of opportunity for us to be personally changed by the Holy Spirit. As we cry out to the Spirit and live in his strength, he transforms us and works out his plan to transform our workplaces through us.

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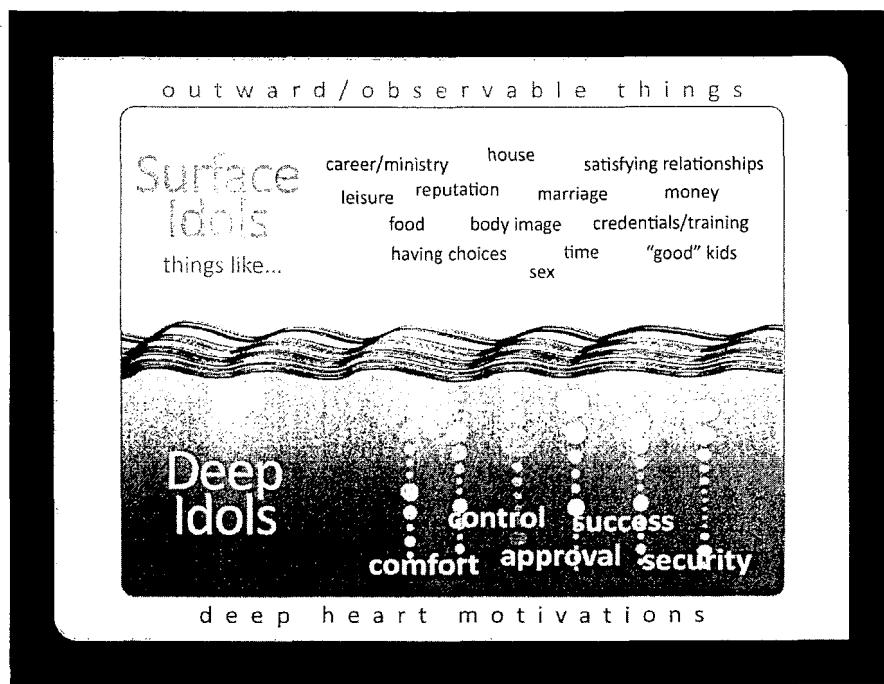
<sup>7</sup> 1 Timothy 2:11-12

## EXERCISE

### HOW WORK MAKES US MORE LIKE CHRIST

Let's take some time to begin identifying the ways we look to something other than Jesus to provide us with satisfaction in life. Because work so often touches our deepest needs for significance, success, and security for ourselves and our families, it is a prime place to see where our hearts are drawn to something other than Jesus and his purposes. Whether we spend our days as a student, executive, stay-home parent, or caregiver for an aging parent, we all struggle with keeping the gospel at the center of what we do. The toilsome and painful parts of work always cause us to ask, "Is Jesus enough to truly satisfy me?" or "Am I relying on my work to provide me with something I think Jesus either cannot or will not give me?"

Take a look at the chart below. It describes the dynamics of how our deeper heart motivations are revealed by the importance we put on external things.



**Surface idols** tend to be concrete, specific items that are often good and basic things in our life and work. When they come under the control of our deeper idols, however, they go from being good and basic things, to ultimate things—things we think we simply must have, often at any cost. As good and basic things, most of the time they will continue to remain as part of our work and life, but they need to be "put in their place" by applying the gospel to detach them from our deep idols, and put them under the guidance of the Spirit.

**Deep idols** are the subtle, basic motivations for work that exist at the level of personal drives and character traits nurtured over a lifetime. Because they are so deeply embedded, they tend to express themselves indirectly through good and basic things, turning them into ultimate motivations. Often a single deep idol can manifest itself in a number of different outward actions and attitudes. Applying the gospel to these deep idols happens through repenting of our desires for what they pretend to offer apart from God.

As you look at the chart, discuss the following questions:

1. In your work life, where do you tend to struggle with "good and basic" things becoming "ultimate things"? (List a few of the "good and basic" things that are operating as surface motivations below.)
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
2. What do you *really* want from these "good and basic" things? What deeper fears, idols or desires might subtly underlie your list of surface motivations above to make the "good and basic" things "ultimate things" in your work?
  - 1.
  - 2.
  - 3.
3. When it comes to your work, how would you complete the following based on your answers to the above two questions:

Jesus + \_\_\_\_\_ = my happiness

4. What are some ways that you might begin to repent of this false reality?

# LESSON 3

## FROM TOIL TO FAITH: DESIRING A NEW WAY TO LIVE

### BIG IDEA

This lesson helps us begin identifying patterns in the ways we fail to integrate our faith with our work. These patterns often point to the deep idols that undermine the way we relate to our heavenly Father and our neighbors as well. First, we'll dig in to see how our "functional idols" might be affecting our behavior; then we'll consider the ways we need to repent and the alternate ways we can deepen our partnership with Christ and welcome the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.<sup>8</sup> Our status as God's beloved children compels us to put off sin and to put on righteousness by faith — to shed old ways of relating and to welcome new gospel-centered ones instead.<sup>9</sup> A gospel-centered understanding of work propels us to repent of "bent" coping patterns and deep idols, and by faith to more fully participate in God's ongoing work in the world as we are conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Bible Conversation: | Read and talk about the passages(s)  |
| Article:            | <b><i>Our Flawed Methods</i></b>   |
| Discussion:         | Think through some personal implications of a gospel-centered perspective and imagine new ways of relating to those around you |
| Home Exercise:      | <b><i>Orphans at Work</i></b>  |
| Wrap Up:            | Final thoughts and prayer  |

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

We've focused on the reality that the gospel enables us to see our daily life as a partnership with God in his work in the world. He wants the contours of our lives to reflect his passionate heart for a restored creation and redeemed humanity. In the same way, God also desires that we do all we do to his glory and honor. We've also looked at how God uses the hard things in our work to make us more like Jesus, and how those hard tests and trials can help us renounce some of the deeper idols that have motivated us. In this lesson we'll talk about how and why we often give in to functional idols that hinder the power of the gospel in our work. We call these ways of how reducing the gospel's impact on our lives *pretending* and *performing*.

Resisting the work of God in our lives always involves one of these two patterns.

(*Pretense* minimizes sin by making ourselves out to be something we are not, and *Performance* reduces God's standards to become something we can meet.)

**SETUP:** Each of the following parables involves people who experienced God's love and provision but failed to put off false ways of relating and put on truth. They chose

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<sup>8</sup> II Corinthians 5:17

<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3

to live according to their appetites and pressures of life that seemed right at the time, rather than live in light of the truth they had experienced.

These stories may be familiar to you, so as you read them try to put yourself in the position of the main character who is failing to grasp the truth.

**READ:** The first parable is the story of the unmerciful servant, which was one of a number of stories Jesus told in response to a Zealot's question of who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Would someone read Matthew 18:21-35 aloud?

**ASK:** How did the servant fail in his response? What should it have been?

**ASK:** Can you remember a time when you failed to apply the truth of the gospel in your daily life? Have you ever failed to do the right thing or actively chosen something wrong because of outside pressures or demands? What was motivating you when you forgot the gospel?

**READ:** Our second story is about the lost sons, told in response to the Pharisees' complaint that Jesus was hanging out with sinners and tax collectors. One son clings to his own righteousness and one begs for forgiveness. In this reading, put yourself in the place of the brother who does everything right but resents his father's generosity towards his sibling. Will someone read Luke 15:11-32 for us?

**ASK:** You may work or live alongside people with mentalities similar to the older brother. They do not live in light of the Father's love for them but live in the light of their own righteousness, viewing themselves falsely and dispensing justice when mercy is required. Such people justify and build themselves up but miss the bigger picture of how much they've been loved and forgiven? Some may become overtly dishonest; others are more subtle. How do you relate to them?

**ASK:** How does the story of the two brothers and generous father speak to your own struggles of missing the gospel with performance and pretense?

## ARTICLE

Every context we move into has its own set of values and expectations. As we move from context to context and encounter those new expectations, they can easily overwhelm us so that we forget our partnership in the kingdom of God and God's call on our lives. The way out of this forgetfulness is repentance that flows from a knowledge of the righteousness of Christ, and the knowledge that we are beloved sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. As we remember whose we are, we also need to understand what we are repenting from and what we are being conformed to. In ***Our Flawed Methods*** we'll examine a few of the approaches that "religious" people often take as they relate to the context of their daily life and work. Then we'll discuss an alternative gospel approach.

HAND OUT *copies of Our Flawed Methods*.

READ: ***Our Flawed Methods***.

## DISCUSSION

### LEADER'S NOTE:

It might be hard for group members to come up with examples if this is their first time hearing about performance and pretense. Don't push it if this exercise seems too abstract for some. The goal is simply to help the group recognize the underlying pitfalls of pretense and performance, and to see how some gospel alternatives might be formed in the circumstances of their own work.

ASK: Where have you seen these flawed approaches of pretense and performance?

ASK: How is accepting these "old" ways dangerous for us?

ASK: How are you tempted to succumb to this thinking in your work, home, or school?

ASK: What would it look like to be a gospel presence in your current environment?

ASK: What are some old ways you need to put off or new ways you can put on?

HOME EXERCISE: How do you miss opportunities for gospel transformation in our own lives? Are we blind to the influences around us that sway us from the gospel? To gain a better understanding of the way we're impacted by performance and pretense, here's an exercise to help decode the patterns of your daily life and how it might be influenced by pretense and performance.

TURN TO: *Your copy of Orphans at Work*

WRAP UP: Ask God to open your eyes to his work and presence this week.

## ARTICLE

# OUR FLAWED METHODS

In the Bible God often called his people to work and live in the midst of pluralistic societies—Egypt, Canaan, Babylon and the Roman Empire.<sup>10</sup> As postmodern people, we work and live in similar circumstances. Even though Western culture was built on biblical values, our society is now almost completely pluralistic and often antagonistic to the gospel. How should we live in such a society and how can we engage those around us in the “neighborhoods” where we study, live, work and play?

Your supervisor says “Copy these articles and get them off to the client by the end of the week!” You both know that the articles were created by a direct competitor and that they are copyrighted. To copy them would be wrong (they aren’t your company’s intellectual property) but to quit your job over a foolish demand feels wrong too. You’ve invested several years of your life in this place to try and make a difference, and you need the income right now.

Your classmates have developed a highly sophisticated sign language that allows them to communicate with one another during an exam. You can’t prove that they are cheating, but because you overheard them bragging about their exploits you wonder if you should talk to them about it.

A group of stay at home moms begins discussing a new family in the neighborhood who comes from another culture and isn’t quite cued in on the social cues of the neighborhood. They begin to make some stereotypical jokes about the family, and wonder why you aren’t joining with them.

We may know the requirements of God’s law, but sometimes we’re confronted with situations at work, home, or school in which we’re asked to participate in something we know to be morally wrong (perhaps there is even an official organizational value like maximizing shareholder value by any legal means that beckons us to move right to the edge of our moral framework.) There are three types of responses that Christians have to these types of dilemmas.

**PRETENDING.** The first type of response GIVES IN to inappropriate demands (sinful, immoral, unwise or unlawful activities, values and demands) out of an uncritical acceptance of workplace values or an indifference (or even ignorance) that we are being asked to do something wrong. This response may involve a complacent distortion of the gospel truth that we’re forgiven for the sinful things we do. It may reflect a failure to connect personal faith with public life. For these reasons, this approach has also been called “license” or “pretense” because we’re pretending (or being fooled into thinking) that what we’re doing doesn’t matter—and we’ll automatically be forgiven anyway. We make ourselves out to be much better off than we really are (e.g. we fool ourselves into thinking that we aren’t sinning or grieving God in our actions.) With this mindset, we become a law unto ourselves. – declaring a type of personal righteousness or inner knowledge outside of Christ. (Just like the case above where a supervisor encourages the

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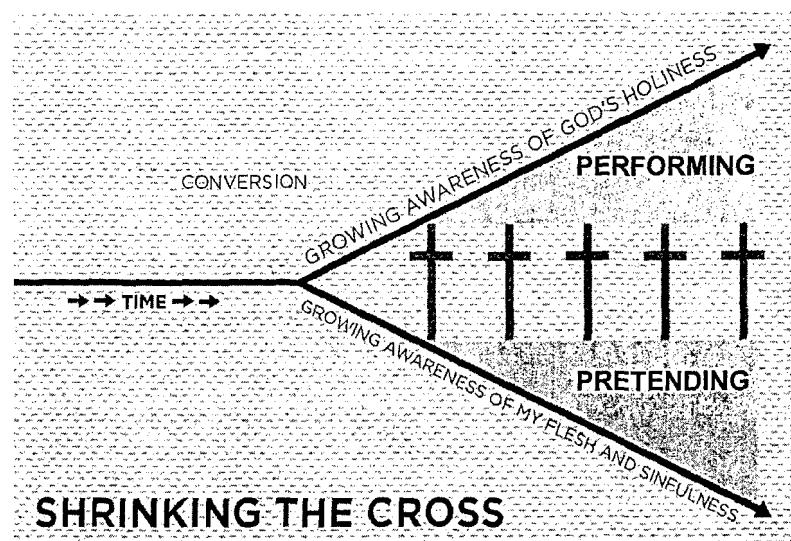
<sup>10</sup> NOTE: A pluralistic society is a culture or environment that expects its citizens or members to accept a broad set of often contradictory personal beliefs in others.

illegal forgery of others work as our own - we think that because we have good intentions, or are being forced into a situation where we have compromised our values or the truth, that we can participate and not be culpable because we are either forgiven or not at fault for our actions because we have done so under someone else's authority.)

**PERFORMING.** The second set of responses centers around NOT GIVING IN to cultural values or institutional demands that press in on us. While it is a good thing to uphold the demands of the law, often our interpretation of God's law becomes centered on removing ourselves from the situation. By resisting or fleeing our circumstances, we make this one situation THE test of our personal righteousness. We would call this a "performance" or "self-righteous" approach because once again a law outside of Christ's righteousness and keeping of the law on our behalf is set up for us to follow. ( So again in the case of the copyright violation, a person focused on a performance mindset would see quitting their job in protest as the only legitimate choice. But in so doing the organization and situation remains unchanged. A new employee might be brought in to do the same thing tomorrow, and the patterns and structure of sin and injustice will continue.) Rather than setting our hope and security on Christ's righteousness as the strength to resist, those who "perform" feel as if they must demonstrate their righteousness on their own. Those who uphold the law in this way set up their dilemma as a personal test of righteousness, rather than a situation where the gospel can shine through and make a difference. By removing themselves from the situation in a self-righteous manner, those who follow this approach lose the ability to relate to their co-workers in the process. Rather than coming alongside others to assist,

"performers" set themselves over others in moral superiority to demonstrate their own righteousness. In doing so they often lose opportunities to positively impact their work culture in the future because of how they approached the problem.

We need to remember that our right beliefs are never the source of our goodness and the main problem for non-Christians is not their value system, but the fact that they don't know Christ. If neither of these previous two responses is appropriate, how can we live and work differently as Christians?



**A GOSPEL-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE: IN, NOT OF, THE WORLD.** A third response centers around a different solution to the problem and asks "What is the dilemma here?" and "How can I, as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven *and* a good participant in my work culture uphold God's law *and* meet the true needs of my workplace?" (as a good employee, student, parent, etc.). Answering the question "How can I serve a holy God and love my neighbor without giving into the structural sins of my work environment?" helps us navigate upholding God's law as well as the legitimate needs of those in authority.

To better understand this third way, we need to see how the pretense and performance responses are similar. They both assume that we've been abandoned in our circumstances and that the gospel is powerless in our particular situation. Believing this, we feel compelled to rely on ourselves because we assume that God has abandoned us. We adopt an orphan mentality, where we believe that we are alone and without outside resources in our circumstances. A reliance on either personal performance or pretense minimizes the work of the cross in our lives, just at the point where we most need to rely on the righteousness of Christ rather than ourselves.

When the gospel is actively at work in our lives, we grow in our awareness of two things. First, our awareness of God's character grows—his great love, his holiness, his power and his presence—not just intellectually, but in ways that make us rely more on him and less on ourselves. Secondly, our sense of our own sinfulness also grows. We see more and more how the fall has deeply touched every action and thought—in fact, even motivations we thought were wholesome and pure now seem to be affected by our sin. Again, this is not merely head knowledge, but something we experience.

God doesn't want us at the poles of performance or pretense. He wants us to be whole people who can repent of our sins and weaknesses and learn to work, pray and act in reliance on him, rather than ourselves. He wants us to seek not just our own welfare, but the prosperity and peace of all who are in our homes, schools and workplaces. God has made us his people and he desires us to be "set apart" in the way we live for him and empowered by him. At the same time, he also desires us to retain a "set among" quality that keeps us from completely isolating ourselves from a common life with those who aren't followers of Christ.<sup>11</sup>

A gospel response to the temptations of pretense and performance requires us to rely on God's holiness, power and love more deeply, since we understand that our heart's sinful nature affects everything we do. Without a gospel perspective, we are vulnerable to the pressures of our work culture, whether as a student we are tempted to cheat on an exam like everyone else, or as a stay-at-home mom we are tempted to gossip to make ourselves look good, or, like the employee in the opening example, we are tempted to give in to demands to do something illegal at work because we (probably) won't get caught and we don't want to upset our supervisor.

*What if*, in the case of the demanding supervisor, you felt the freedom to go over your supervisor's head, or proposed working overtime on your own time to write the required article from scratch to make the required deadline, rather than copy the specifications and pass them off as your own work?

*What if* the student had the courage to say to his classmates, "I am tempted to cheat too, but I want to do more than get by in how I live. To thrive I need to live with confidence in my giftedness and abilities"?

*What if* the stay-at-home mom had compassion on the family that was being gossiped about and reach out to them and encouraged friends to do the same?

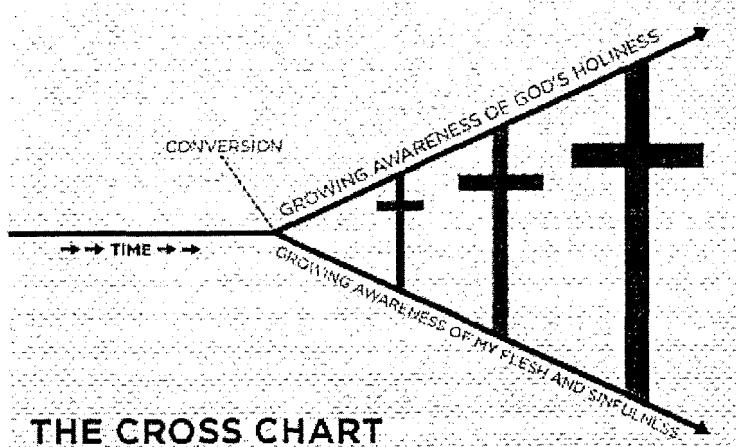
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<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah 29:5-6

A gospel-centered perspective is a powerful alternative to the temptations and motivations associated with “pretend” and “perform.” When we perform, we rely on ourselves to look or perform better than others; when we pretend, we foolishly give in to temptation, thinking (falsely) that we have no other recourse but to yield by fleeing those demands and temptations. As we’ll see in coming weeks, a reliance on the gospel and Jesus’ power and righteousness helps us navigate the dangers of performance and pretense that we face. We’ll unpack different aspects of these tensions in the remainder of the study. Remember that in every tension we feel, God is at work in us to change our work cultures for his glory while at the same time he is working on us to see that we’re transformed by the gospel.

Growing in our awareness of our own temptation and failure in our work is no fun! It means admitting to ourselves and others that we probably aren’t as good as we make ourselves out to be. We need to rest in Jesus’ righteousness more deeply if we are to face our own sinfulness honestly. Otherwise, our burden of guilt, shame and regret will turn us back to our functional idols, like making money, achieving success, and looking good, even when we know deep inside that we’ve failed in many ways.

Growing in our understanding of God’s holiness isn’t easy either. It means that we see clearly how God is leading us in our work and relying on him rather than ourselves. It also means reflecting deeply on his displeasure over our failures and sin, and then doing something about it. If we aren’t resting in what Jesus has done for us, we’ll just end up working harder in the same old ways, trying to earn God’s favor with our own performance rather than relying more deeply on his grace.



In the next seven lessons we’ll look at seven ways to turn from performance or pretense towards a gospel-centered perspective in our work. The gospel grows us in our reliance on Christ and the power of the Spirit. As our reliance on Jesus grows, there is less and less room for performance or pretense.

As we are able to see and repent of the ways we choose performance and pretense, we make more room to rely on God’s presence and character *and* become more aware of the impact of our own sin in all we do, to ultimately grow in the gospel and allow God to increase the work of the cross in our lives. The gospel changes everything. On this side of heaven, we will always find ourselves in need of repentance, but is that repentance is from God, it should always encourage us to rest more deeply in Christ’s perfect obedience and pursue following him in obedience more willingly and joyfully. Christ lived the perfect life for us so we can be led by his Spirit to humbly advance his kingdom in this world.

## EXERCISE ORPHANS AT WORK

At home, work, or school, we can fall prey to unhealthy thinking based on pretense- or performance -oriented motivations rather than a gospel-centered perspective. Sometimes the problem is our environment itself and the assumptions and expectations operating there. Sometimes the problem lies in the attitudes we bring to our work. Ask yourself:

- Has Jesus called me to my work circumstances or am I there because of my own choices and abilities?
- Does God continue to give me the resources I need to succeed in my work, or have I been orphaned and forgotten by God where he has placed me?
- In the most glorious and painful circumstances, am I more motivated by personal pride and success or by God being glorified through my work?
- Am I motivated primarily by personal financial gain or do I see myself as someone God can use to glorify himself and serve others as part of my work community?
- Can I express the gospel creatively in what I do? Am I able to speak up for the hope I have in Christ, or do I work and live in fear that people will reject me?

Now, let's see how these questions play out in scenarios you may have seen in your household, school or workplace. Consider the following people who have lost a gospel perspective on the fallen aspects of their work. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Because of their personal dilemmas, what might be some places where they are being tempted to turn good and basic things into ultimate things?
- How are they falsely tempted to fill in the blank: Jesus + \_\_\_\_\_ = my happiness?
- How can a gospel-centered perspective inform a performance- or pretense-based perspective on their circumstances?

*(For more help, review the GOSPEL-CENTERED RESPONSE chart that follows.)*

- You are an owner of rental properties. A needy family threatens to sue you because they feel that the rental house you provided for them at a discounted rate is substandard. You ask God, "What have I done to deserve this?"

- You are in your third year of graduate studies and being bullied by an advisor who believes that persons of faith should not be in your field of study. You wonder if God wants you to pursue another career.
- You are a building contractor and a member of your church fails to pay you the full amount agreed upon in the original contract. You talk to some church leaders but they are reluctant to mediate the situation. You wonder if you should look for a new church.
- You are passed over for a promotion. The position is given to a coworker who previously took credit for your work and minimized your contributions. You wonder if you can work under his leadership.

### PRETENSE BASED RESPONSE

Obedience doesn't matter, I'm accepted.

My motivations are pragmatic - based on the values of my work context alone.

God has left me to my own devices and abilities – faith doesn't relate to this matter or my work.

When circumstances go badly, I am angry at myself, since I believe that my decisions should lead to a comfortable life.

When others critique me, I devastated because I am so identified with my decisions and work. Any negative evaluation of my work comes at great personal cost because work is my identity.

The main purpose of my prayer life is to help me better control of my environment. Prayer only changes my heart.

My identity is based mainly on how hard or smart or craftily I work and so I look down on those I perceive as lazy, unintelligent or unwise. I both disdain and feel superior to those around me.

### GOSPEL-CENTERED RESPONSE

I'm accepted, therefore I obey.

My motivation is based on gratitude and joy for being called to where I'm placed.

I respond to God in delight and gratitude because he calls me his own and I resemble and reflect him.

When circumstances are unfavorable, I remind myself that my punishment fell on Jesus and that God allows all the circumstances in my life, so that I'll be more conformed to his character.

When criticized, I may struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a "good person." My identity is not built on my record or my work alone, but on God's love for me in the person Christ.

My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with God.

My self-view is not based on personal achievement. In Christ I'm sinful and also a beloved heir. I'm so bad off that only Jesus could die for me and so loved he gladly died in my place. As someone who is saved by grace, I don't perceive others as too different from me.

### PERFORMANCE BASED RESPONSE

I obey, therefore I'm accepted.

My motivation is to not do the wrong thing because of the potential consequences.

I respond to God in order to get things from God. He's only generous when I obey.

When circumstances go wrong, I am angry at God since I believe that anyone that makes good decisions deserves a good life.

If I face criticism, I am furious because I think of myself as a "good person" and my positions are always well thought through. Criticism threatens my value system and even the will of God.

My prayers consist largely of petition for circumstances and heat up when I am in a time of need or feel pressures in life.

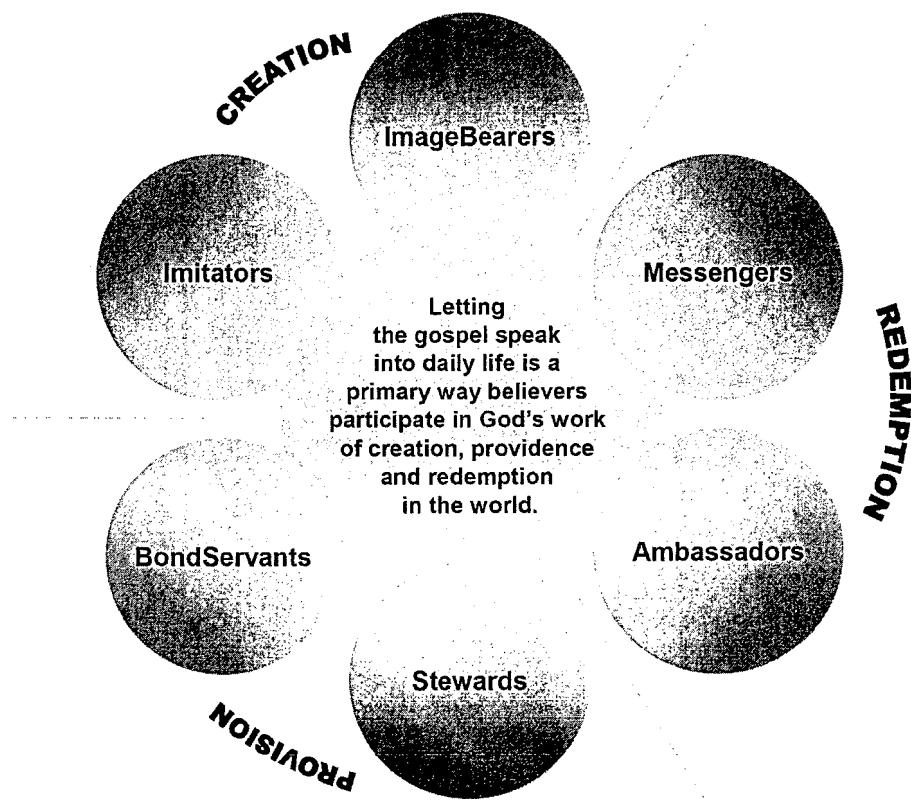
My self-view centers upon my living up to my own standards or goals, when I do, I feel confident. If I don't, I feel inadequate. This makes me prone to a lack of mercy or patience towards failing people.

## REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION TO LESSONS 4-9

In the past three lessons, we've seen that our work and daily life are the major contexts in which we reflect God's character and glory to the world. We've looked at how our work changes the world, how we are changed by God through our work, and how we often can get our perspective on faith and work wrong.

We now want to look at how, as believers, we can bring a gospel-centeredness to our work as we work in partnership with God. We want to examine ourselves as (1) partners in God's creative work as Image-bearers and Imitators, (2) partners in God's providence as Bond-servants and Stewards, and finally (3) partners in God's redemptive work as Ambassadors and Messengers for the gospel. Our last lesson looks at how God partners with us and renews us in our Sabbath from work.

In the next six lessons, we'll look more deeply into each of these six aspects of our partnership with God, using the gospel as our lens and our guide.



## LESSON 4

### IMAGE-BEARERS: A GOSPEL LOOK AT THE IMAGE OF GOD

#### BIG IDEA

When our eyes are opened to the work of God, we participate in this work just by seeing the world from a gospel perspective - being observant where he has placed us and being ready to speak and act on what we've come to know through faith in Jesus. Our adoption into God's household as beloved children qualifies us to walk in partnership with him. Our daily work, where we are tugged in so many different directions by people and institutions that want to conform us into their image, is nevertheless being transformed by our faithful gospel presence. It is no accident that God has placed you where you are. Through your presence, you reflect God's character as one of his ImageBearers to those around you.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passage(s)

Article: *ImageBearers in God's Economy*

Discussion: Process concepts of *ImageBearers in God's Economy*

Home Exercise: *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Opportunity*

Wrap Up: Final thoughts and prayer

#### BIBLE CONVERSATION

The gospel transforms our perspective on work from being an idolatrous temptation or source of toil, pain and frustration to become a way for us to reflect God's image in daily life. When we come to faith, we realize that God has been going before us to encourage and guide us as his children. By faith our hearts turn from fear to worship, as we reflect his image and glorify him within the institutions where he has placed us. The gospel frees us to reveal God's imprint on our lives as we faithfully serve where he has called us.

#### SETUP

Because of the gospel, ImageBearers have a righteous and renewed perspective on God's work in history. This frees us from a fear of circumstances and gives us new eyes to see God's work. A gospel perspective flows from a daily relationship of repentance and faith with our Creator, empowered by the righteousness of Christ as the foundation for a renewed relationship to our work.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we are told that Satan has blinded the world in sin and has left unbelievers cut off from the things of God. Spiritual blindness comes with and from idolatry and a preoccupation with the things of this world. The unspiritual worry and say, "What should we eat? What should we drink? With what should we be clothed?"<sup>12</sup> Their mental energy and physical strength are absorbed in their present urgent circumstances rather than the things of God and gratitude for his providence.

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 6

In this week's *Bible Conversation* we want to look at two passages that show how we can be freed to see our circumstances with new eyes and how that new vision helps reflect the restored image of God through faith. We'll look at one Old Testament passage and one New Testament passage. These passages may be familiar, but try and think of what they teach us about God making us witnesses to his work in history.

**READ:** The first story is the story of Elisha and his servant, who are surrounded by the Syrian army that is ready to destroy them. Would someone read 2 Kings 6:8-23 aloud?

**ASK:** What is happening here?

Why do you think Elisha's servant could not see Israel's chariots at first?

What enabled Elisha's servant to see the reality around him?

Why is it important that Elisha's servant (and not just Elisha) gained a different perspective on that day?

How does faith grow in our lives?

**ASK:** Was there ever a time when you or someone you know lacked the faith to have a godly perspective on life's circumstances?

What changed you or them as you/they struggled in this manner?

**READ:** The second passage we're looking at is Ephesians 1:15-23. These verses are one long, rich and profound sentence that spills out from Paul in worship and joy. Would someone read Ephesians 1:15-23 aloud?

**ASK:** Why is Paul praying for the Ephesians this way? What is his motivation?

What are some things Paul is praying would happen in the Ephesians' lives?

Take a look at the phrase "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened." Why is it important that the Ephesians' hearts (and ours) are enlightened? What is the alternative? What is the source and result of their enlightenment?

**ASK:** How do these passages relate to being ImageBearers where God places us?

#### TRANSITION TO ARTICLE:

The gospel changes us at a foundational level, for in it we gain a new perspective on our daily life and work. The gospel gives us eyes of faith, that move our attention from how circumstances affect us toward an openness to the work of God going on all around us. Rather than allowing us to work out plans in isolation, God has enlisted us to share in the responsibilities and opportunities of his kingdom rule. By welcoming former rebels into his family, God is working out something much bigger and more beautiful than anything we might have imagined. Let's turn to an article that looks at the surprising characteristics of Image-bearers in God's kingdom household.

## ARTICLE

Turn to the article ***ImageBearers in God's Economy*** in your guide and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

## DISCUSSION

Let's think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: What ideas from this article are interesting to you?

ASK: How might these ideas change your outlook on your own work?

ASK: How might these concepts free you up to work differently?

HOME EXERCISE: We've been talking about motivations for work. Help diagnose the perspective and motivations in your life by working through a personal case study in ***Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Opportunity***.

TURN TO: Your copy of ***Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Opportunity*** to begin.

WRAP UP: Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

### IMAGEBEARERS IN GOD'S ECONOMY

The modern word *economy* comes from a Greek word that literally means the “good housekeeping” or stewardship of something or someone. The picture that the Bible paints of God’s economy, or work in human history, is one of God’s deep love and care for humanity, coupled with an invitation to reflect him and participate in the ongoing growth, redemption and care of his kingdom. We enter into God’s economy or household when we receive the gospel by faith. Through the gospel, God invites us to become ImageBearers who watch, reflect and imitate his care for his creation as beloved partners in his household work.

As participants in the various institutions of the world, ordained by God but also fallen (media, government, education, entertainment, households, businesses, science, etc.), we may have once operated without a knowledge of the gospel. Without the gospel, we relied on our own devices and were pressed into the mold of those same institutions—to be made and conformed to their “image.” Each one has its own language, values and rewards apart from (and sometimes opposed to) the purposes of God. Even now, those institutions are at odds among themselves as they seek to make all human culture subservient to their goals, aims and values.

But the gospel has changed all that for us. At great cost, our elder brother Jesus, the first born of creation, took on flesh to show us how to be truly human in every way. He bore the truest image of both man and God for us to see. Through the victory of his life, death and resurrection Jesus reversed the curse of sin and death present in us and our institutions. Now he gives believers his life and record as partners in his work. Just as the eyes of Elisha’s servant were opened to God’s work and thus to new ways of relating to his enemies, so God uses the gospel to open our eyes to new ways of relating to believers and unbelievers in our work.

Ephesians says that because Jesus went before us, on our behalf, with a perfect record, we are now recipients of the free gift of God’s grace (Christ’s righteous record) along with even more gracious gifts - like joy, peace, patience, and kindness- that reflect God’s image and character.<sup>13</sup> For example, because of our new record in Christ, we no longer need to fear any situation or circumstance. Not only do we have a tremendous calling and freedom in our work, we now also have all the resources we need from God to accomplish the tasks set before us. Similarly, the Spirit empowers us to build up the body of Christ in unity and the knowledge of the Son of God. Because of our self reliance and pride, the gifts of grace that Christ now shares with us freely, were formerly inaccessible because of our fallen nature and lack of the gospel in our lives.) The grace of God is now unleashed by faith and empowered by the Holy Spirit to build up God’s kingdom through our work.

Let’s consider some aspects of ImageBearing in our work.

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<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 4

### **Our heavenly Father uses our work for his eternal purposes.**

We've always borne God's image but now, because of the gospel's work in us, the image we reflect resembles him more clearly. It isn't necessarily bound up in the idolatries of our old nature. Because of the gospel, we are much less likely to use God's gifts selfishly, either to win his favor or to use them for personal gain. So for us as believers, the most important part of our work is just showing up as ImageBearers who reflect what God is already doing! To be faithfully present and empowered by the gospel no matter what we do or where we are is the foundation of our calling. Because Jesus has promised to be faithfully present to us, and then to work through us, the real work begins when we show up, pay attention to what he is doing and apply his power and perspective to the work at hand.

*Three stoneworkers were building a cathedral when a stranger wandered by. The first stoneworker was transferring rocks to a pile, near a wall. "What are you doing?" said the stranger. "Can't you see that I'm carrying rocks?" he replied. The stranger asked the second worker, "What are you doing?" He said "I'm building a wall." A little later, the man came upon a third mason. "What are you doing?" he asked. This worker smiled for he knew whose image he reflected. "I'm building a cathedral to the glory of God!" A Godly perspective on his circumstances had made all the difference.*

### **Our work puts the focus on Jesus' work.**

Secondly, not only do we bear God's image, we also have the potential to reflect and bring glory to the person of Jesus in our work. Because our work flows from what Jesus has done for us, we do our best at work to honor him. We don't have to earn our relationship with God or our righteousness—that comes from Jesus. But now as God's children, we desire to bring glory to the family name, just as Jesus did willingly! The result is that not only do we want to do good work, we want to work with the proper humility; we're not pointing to ourselves and our achievements, but to the achievement and person of Jesus. The goal is giving away glory rather than hoarding it for ourselves.

### **Empowered by the Spirit.**

Believers have been promised God's indwelling power through the Spirit. Through the gospel, we have been promised to be called into situations of opportunity, where in our own strength we are incapable of the work at hand. But Scripture teaches that these moments are opportunities for God to display his miraculous power in ways that men will recognize are not from us, but from God. We will have tests and trials; sometimes we will be put in harm's way and restored, sometimes we will be put under pressure right up to our breaking point. Yet in all circumstances, God awaits our prayers for his kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth—to extend his rule and reign over all people and institutions—just as it is in heaven.

### **Our ImageBearing points others to the true Imagebearer.**

It shouldn't surprise us that many people who don't know Jesus do excellent work. Their motivations might be mixed up, but because of the humility that comes from the gospel, we can praise them for it; because we know they bear a marred version of God's imprint, underneath their surface motivations of self-protection and pride just as we once did. They have the capability to more deeply and purposefully reflect God's image and bring him glory. So the sometimes limited aspect of God's character that we reflect should be appropriately humbling; it shows us our desperate need for the gifts of God reflected in others. Those who understand the gospel don't fly solo: God puts us in situations where

we need the support of unbelievers, as he impacts the institutions where we've been placed for our good and his glory. So eventually, when they ask and are ready to listen, we can show them where their motivations are off balance and how Jesus can give them freedom from toil as well.

*This past year God has placed a new friend in my life through some extraordinary circumstances. The 'extraordinary' story is really one that is ordinary, but unique, where God used everyday people in their daily callings to point someone towards his work. My new friend who was living for himself and pursuing what was right in his own eyes, underwent a radical change in his perspective on life. He had a thriving business, a loving family, and by outward standards seemed to be thriving. But inwardly he seemed to be disappointed and searching for ways to numb the tyranny of his own expectations. One evening while playing hockey he fell to the ice and was whisked away to the hospital with a sudden brain aneurism. He underwent surgery and in those moments cried out to God to spare him. God answered his prayers.*

*Believers who were doctors, moms, students and friends surrounded, prayed and cared for him and his family with great love; what Jesus asks us to do when he said we should love our neighbor as ourselves. They all pointed to and reminded the family of what God had done and was doing. He left the hospital a very different man, humbled by God, eager to learn more about this Jesus who had changed these many others who cared for him and his family so very well.*

The Good Samaritan is a model neighbor because he came across someone made in God's image on a typical journey in his daily life. He had a selfless perspective on his surroundings and responded to what God was already doing by putting him in the circumstances of someone else's need. We bear God's image not merely when we do something radical or extreme, but when in the course of our daily callings, we stop to reflect on what God has us doing and simply care for those whom we meet, to love them in quiet, practical, selfless ways.

So as God's ImageBearers our personal circumstances all have the potential to be an enjoyable pursuit and a way to participate in what God is already doing. Instead of using our work as a way to perform and please God or as a way to get all we can for ourselves, the gospel frees us to participate in God's work by being reflections of our heavenly Father that show his creative beauty, fruitful providence and redemptive care. As we engage in our God-given work—managing neighborhoods, households, people, products, and services; studying alongside others; or serving in leadership over the responsibilities we've been given—we participate in what God is doing in the world. In the church, God is creating a whole new interconnected economy of men and women who relate to him as their true bridegroom in a huge household that reflects his image and draws on his love and power in their relationships.

Our generous God is opening the eyes of our hearts to his great invitation by faith to reflect and trust him in all we do. Daily he is using us as his ImageBearers—vital participants in the coming kingdom—that bring him glory through this new economy, where all things are being brought under his righteous rule and reign.

## HOME EXERCISE ORDINARY WORK, EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY

Most of the time our work, school and even family lives function at two levels.

First, there is the immediate level of following through on commitments, responsibilities, and day-to-day issues of organizing, scheduling, productivity, meetings, problem solving, etc. These are the things directly related to our daily work, whatever it may be. Even though these responsibilities fill up the majority of our day, let's look at them as surface issues. This may seem strange since they take up so much of our time, energy, talents and attention, but usually they are the things that are easiest to navigate and the ones in which we use our natural gifts and skills.

At a second, deeper level of work lie weightier issues of attitude and perspective. At this level, we encounter the issues that keep us up at night, the ones that give us ulcers and bring out the worst in us. These include getting along with others, sin and forgiveness, communication, thinking the best of one another, friendships, personal jealousy, power and authority. Unless we deliberately expose them, most of these issues will remain below the surface; unspoken and implicit while they shape and largely control almost all the surface issues.

Let's work through an example that looks at this deeper second realm.

*Imagine yourself in a workplace discussion on how resources (time, money etc.) should be applied to different departmental budgets. From these kinds of discussions in the past, you predict how your peers will behave this time. Joe is hard to get along with because he tends to be brash and overly assertive. Pat usually loses out in these sorts of discussions because she avoids conflict and won't fight for what she thinks is best, even when she has excellent ideas. At the meeting, you support Pat's point of view because you think it is a good idea but Joe becomes defensive. Later you get an e-mail from Joe stating that he has decided to not participate in a project with you because he is "too busy."*

Let's summarize what is really happening here. Similar scenarios happen in many places—work, schools, churches, homes, community groups—almost every day.

**ASK: What are some Surface Issue(s) in this example?**

*How budget and company resources are distributed.*

*How decisions are made.*

*The process of how work flows.*

*And the values expected in how people treat one another in the office.*

**ASK: What are some of the Deeper Issue(s)**

*Joe is overly assertive in his approach. His worth comes from being right and getting his way. He keeps a record of rights and wrongs.*

*Pat is insecure about her role within the group and undervalues her own opinion, even when it is an excellent option.*

*The decision making process is more like a dysfunctional family rather than a rational discussion or vote. Everyone is trying to please or win over the boss. What is best for the group seems less important than comparing wins and losses.*

*Joe is angry that he didn't get his way. He punishes you by withdrawing from a previous commitment. He decides based not on what is best for the group or himself; he's just punishing those who disagreed.*

**ASK: What are some gospel ways to move forward?**

(Think how the Image of God is or should be present in coworkers and processes.)

*There are things that you can do one on one and in the group.*

*One on One you can build relationships with Pat and Joe and encourage them to live into the Image of God present in their persons. We should value ourselves (Pat) and others (Joe) equally and fairly as persons with dignity made in the Image of God rather than obstacles to overcome, dominate, or win over.*

*We should make decisions based on what is best for the group or institution, rather than ourselves (Pat having courage to argue, Joe not using powerplays.)*

*In the group, you can encourage your boss to change the decision making process by: Giving everyone a chance to speak. Voting on things as a group, and having everyone explain why they believe the way they voted was what was best for the institution.*

Try another scenario on your own:

*Imagine yourself as a doctor in a health and elder care facility. You visit the facility twice a week during the day to do rounds and check in on patients. The nurses in charge of the night shift are regularly calling to have patients sent to the hospital at the slightest ache or pain, rather than attending to their needs at the facility because they want an easier work load. The day and night shift nurses aides work for the facility and your company has been brought in from the outside to improve patient outcomes, has no authority over the nursing staff.*

**ASK: What are the surface issues?**

**ASK: What are the deeper issues?**

**ASK: How should you interact with the situation as an ImageBearer?**

## LESSON 5

### A NEW ATTITUDE: IMITATING GOD IN A WORLD OF WORK

#### BIG IDEA

As we saw in the last lesson, God gives men and women abilities and talents that can be used to reflect his image and character. Ultimately we offer ourselves to God's service as Imitators of his giftedness and creativity, ready to help bring about the righteousness of his kingdom into this world. Although the Bible says that unbelievers can fulfill God's will without even acknowledging him<sup>14</sup>, it is much more true of believers, who bring him glory as their lives are yielded to the Holy Spirit. The gospel makes us beloved sons and daughters who reflect God's image in our character and identity. The gospel changes our work from something we do for personal gain to something we do as Imitators of God who welcome carrying out his will.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passage(s)

Article: ***Extreme Work Striving and Sloth***

Discussion: Process concepts of ***Extreme Work*** article

Exercise: ***Life Integration Diagnostic***

Wrap Up: Final thoughts and prayer

#### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Too many of us use human standards of success and failure to measure the value of our work instead of how we are being shaped more deeply to become like the person Jesus. We may not realize it, but we have abused the relationships, situations, and roles God has placed us in whenever we have pursued our own idolatrous ends rather than imitate God in his work. Perhaps we think we have earned our roles and relationships rather than having them entrusted to us by God. Maybe we have been ignorant of how the gospel might actually allow us to pursue our work in faith. Christ's finished work and righteousness should jolt us from a fixation on ourselves. When we identify with Jesus, we're freed up to work as Imitators of our creative, sustaining and redeeming heavenly Father.

#### SETUP

Who we are should shape what we do. As ImageBearers who reflect God and share in his work, we are not in our circumstances by chance. God is using us as his partners in the roles and opportunities he has entrusted to us. It brings him joy for us to bear his image and imitate his work. The gospel frees up personal time and effort once spent responding to circumstances in fear and shame. It allows love to flow to others through our work.

As the gospel is worked out in our lives, we begin to see where we have God-given influence in our home and workplace. The gospel gives us courage to step into those places of influence as imitators of God. The gospel helps us to see that we were made to shape our contexts for God's glory and the advance of the gospel.

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<sup>14</sup> Acts 10:1-4, Romans 2:14-15, Romans 13:1-7

Let's look at some passages that get under the surface of our lives to deal with our motivations. In the first passage, Moses is commissioning Israel as he is left behind because of his own disobedience. As he sends the next generation into the Promised Land, he reminds them of God's law and of who God is.

READ: Deuteronomy 4:1-9

ASK: What does Moses propose as the motivation for listening to God and doing what he commands (imitating God)?

LEADER'S NOTE: The critical answer here is that the receiving the land as an inheritance reflects Israel's position as God's beloved children. The coming kingdom of God is their destiny. So the critical action for them and us is to "cling" or "holding fast" to the Lord as the only hope against idols that lead to destruction. The law serves the purpose of pointing us towards Christ now that we understand the gospel by faith.

ASK: What are some sub- benefits listed here? Why are they important?

LEADER'S NOTE: The nations are watching what is happening. (Verse 6 "in the sight of the peoples.) What will be amazing to them is how God is near - that he dwells among his people, rather than far off. (Remember, he appears to his people as a pillar of smoke and cloud of fire among them.) Likewise their keeping of the law and imitating God will bring wisdom and understanding to all the nations.

Now, let's look at Christ's work on our behalf.

READ: Hebrews 2:9-11 and 14-18 ESV

ASK: What is Christ's understanding of our individual circumstances?

ASK: What are some of the implications of willingly walking into situations of suffering and trouble as people who follow and imitate Jesus.

LEADERS NOTE: Jesus sees and honors us. He empowers our obedience and takes on our failure so we can be free from guilt and shame and free to act as his beloved brothers and sisters.

READ: Galatians 2:20-21 ESV

ASK: What does this verse say about how we should be motivated in daily life?

ASK: What do you think it means for us to frustrate or nullify the grace of God?

ASK: How might your lifestyle be nullifying God's grace?

ASK: How is this motivation similar to the Israelites “clinging to the Lord” in Deuteronomy?

#### TRANSITION TO ARTICLE

Our imitation of God’s work can deviate to two extremes: Striving and Sloth. At first glance, these stances appear to be opposites, but when we examine their underlying causes, they become surprisingly equivalent.

When work is our master (when we’re enslaved to our work and *strive* toward it as our ultimate goal, rather than being willing Imitators of God), we have essentially exalted work to be an idol in our lives (something we value and “worship” more than God). When work is seen as a drudgery to avoid because we’re bent towards laziness or leisure, we suffer from an opposite form of idolatry. Under the sway of *sloth*, the desire to “strike it rich” by manipulating the system or to “just get by” with minimal effort can be appealing. The degree to which we look to work as either our salvation or misery shows how the pursuit of career or leisure has become a functional idol or master.

Both extremes stem from misunderstanding the nature of work as something given by God for our good and his glory. As you read ***Extreme Work***, consider how you might be affected.

#### ARTICLE

Turn to the article ***Extreme Work: Striving and Sloth*** in the Participant’s Guide and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

#### DISCUSSION

Let’s think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: How are striving and sloth similar?

ASK: How does a hub-oriented or gospel-centered approach correct the ways we pursue our labor and its fruits?

ASK: How do striving and sloth shrink the work of the cross? (Think about ways they can represent both pretending and performing.)

Let’s make these ideas a little more personal.

ASK: Do you need to repent of any motivations you have towards your work?

HOME EXERCISE: In ***Extreme Work: Striving and Sloth*** we’ve been talking about motivations for work. Help diagnose your motivations by working through your personal case study in ***Life Integration Diagnostic***.

TURN TO: Your copy of ***Life Integration Diagnostic***.

WRAP UP: Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

# EXTREME WORK: STRIVING AND SLOTH

As God's ImageBearers and Imitators, we can only co-create or re-create. For example, farmers don't cause plants to grow, parents don't grow children from the dust of the ground, and scientists can't speak forth a new invention from nothing. This dependence is reflected even more deeply in our relationship with God. We cannot work on our own; we must work in partnership with him and in submission to him, for we can't do what he does. God has chosen us to subdue the earth, fill it, and name his creatures, all in active imitation of him. We work "under" God to reshape and renew, just as we have been shaped and created. As Image-bearers and Imitators we mold, form, and reflect what is already created. Our work, at its best, points back to God as a truer, greater and eternal reality.

Our relationship to work has been marred by the fall, just like our relationships with others and with God. One way this brokenness appears is in our attitudes to work. (There are other ways as well, like how we treat others and how we view God's care and provision, but for now we'll focus on our personal attitudes.)

Rather than seeing work as something God has prepared for and given to us, our attitude towards work is prone to one of two opposite but somewhat equivalent errors: striving and sloth. Rather than seeing themselves as Imitators of God, workaholics dictate to God what they believe to be right by demanding a certain set of outcomes to take place within a certain amount of time through their excessive labor (to try and control circumstances rather than to trust God or other people). The lazy or slothful dictate to God what they believe to be right about life through the absence of hard work (again, rather than to trust God for just gain from honest and righteous work, they look for an unfair gain or windfall with minimal work or unjust efforts.) The pursuit of both striving and sloth are external signs that our perception of what God thinks about us and our work needs to be realigned by the gospel.

### **Striving: Work as Master**

Overwork comes from a false view of life that places our need for comfort, control, security, and approval ahead of our relationship with God. The "surface issue" of overwork often flows from a "deeper motivation" or idol where we want to control our circumstances more than we want to trust God's provision for us – relying on him rather than our work. (This can present itself in the form of role, position, productivity, hours spent working, competence, success, etc.) We let our bent motivations shape our identity rather than God's work in and through us. Striving separates us from God's plan to make us more like Christ. God is always much more concerned with our character than he is with our competence, position or productivity.

Instead of work being one part of life, we allow it to engulf things it should not. When having more wealth, possessions, family or reputation become our motivating or functional idols, the painful striving for more of them begins to come at personal cost. Their idolatry comes as a tradeoff that begins to destroy other things we may want to have more of (wealth destroying family, or possessions harming reputation, etc.). The only tools we have to pursue our deepest motivations are our time, talent and health. God alone gives us these things, and even if we try to pursue them apart from trusting God, they come through his hand. They are gifts from an infinite God to finite humans, to

humble them as idols that will eventually drive them to God, or build them up in gratitude as his people.

To this point, Jesus says to those who strive:

*... do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. . . O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added.*

*Matthew 6:24-34*

There may be many underlying reasons for our overwork, but most center on our failure to trust God for our provision.

### **Sloth: Work as a Curse**

The opposite of striving is sloth. Sloth views work as a curse, burden or affliction to be avoided at all costs. When people feel they are being treated unfairly (underpaid, under-respected, or lacking resources needed to accomplish their task) or they feel the burden that has accompanied work since the fall, they avoid or ignore work, drag their feet or put in minimal effort. If we feel we've been mistreated, we may want to retaliate by not giving a full day's work for a full day's wage. Perhaps at a deeper level, we don't view our work as something that intrinsically glorifies God; we would rather serve ourselves in getting by or pursuing a life dedicated to leisure. Those who struggle with sloth miss the truth that both work and leisure are signposts pointing to Christ's glory. That is why Paul reminds us to:

*Obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*

*Colossians 3:22-24*

On this side of heaven, we will always have an inner tension from the competing priorities of life. As created, finite, and fallen beings with limited time and resources, how else could we feel? The question each of us must ask is "When is 'enough' work enough—and when it is not enough?" Despite the way secular work gurus may rattle on about the possibility of work-life balance, such natural balance is technically impossible, because from day to day demands, deadlines and circumstances change. We are always in flux, tempted to respond to the needs of each day and every life stage differently, by changing our circumstances, rather than through understanding what God has called us to as the author of life. The elusive pursuit of balance can become the goal, rather than the byproduct of God's outside help and calling to mediate the competing demands of life.

Our lack of balance actually goes much deeper. It may be possible to technically not overwork but still be enslaved to our jobs out of our needs for personal success or a good reputation. It is also possible for us to avoid sloth, but to do so only outwardly, without serving Christ well in our daily lives. We might do an extremely good job at a particular task, but it may have been the wrong thing to do overall, because we failed to love our

neighbor well. We need the truth of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit for an accurate understanding of our circumstances.

### **Work-Life Balance and Other Myths**

Given the need to mediate competing time demands, our tendency is to try to be more productive by compartmentalizing—dividing and conquering various parts of life. We hope to address both our needs and wants in the course of our day, and with modern technology we can stuff in more “stuff” than ever before. We never really stop working when we play (and now with social media we never really stop playing while we work!). The borders are blurred and we’re more stressed than ever before.

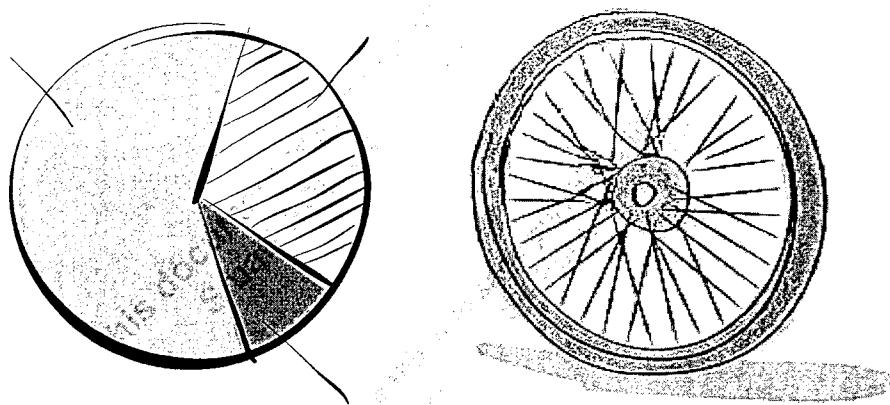
This attempt to break life up into manageable, self-contained pieces allows us to sample all the pieces of our lives without really having to say no to any one part. We think compartmentalizing will allow us to divide up life and allocate so many hours to work, so many hours to family time, so many hours to church, leisure, etc. This tends to work pretty well most of the time, until conflicts between categories or spheres arise. Here is the fatal problem in the approach - when margin in any one category disappears or is overloaded it produces competing time and energy demands with no way to mediate the overload into other categories than guilt, which can produce either an overload in work, frustration, anger or paralysis (e.g. the car breaks down on the way to an important event, there is a surprise life event – birth, death or disability, you or your spouse take on too many emotional or time commitments).

The biggest drawback to this “pie” perspective on a balanced life is that each individual piece (your job, personal life, kids, parents, God etc.) is put in competition with the other parts. Time spent in any one area is by definition time taken away from another. This produces segmented and divided people. Your separate worlds never challenge each other, blend or interact. In such a system we are subtly encouraged to live lives with portions of our selves warring against other parts as we move between different sets of expectations and even different sets of values according to context. This solution glosses over the fact that God has created us to be whole people and that true growth makes us want to be *more* integrated, not less.

To understand the weaknesses in the pie solution, think of how you would respond to the following situations, both at a surface level and motivational level?

- The boss demands that you work overtime on your spouse's birthday.*
- You've just had a third child, who has medical issues and will require special hospitalized care for the foreseeable future.*
- Your car breaks down on the way home from the airport after a business trip and your spouse needs to get to work on night shift?*
- You become affected by a medical condition that will affect your ability to do your job. You debate whether you should tell anyone at work.*
- You move to a new area, but cannot sell your home where you used to live, without losing a substantial amount of money.*

A more biblical solution is to think about our lives as spoked wheels with God as the hub. Everything else takes its proper place as a spoke attached to the hub. If any spoke becomes detached, it may become a problem for the rest of the wheel, but the failure is not catastrophic. God holds it all together. If one spoke requires less load, the other spokes (areas of life) can help absorb the stress guided by the hub. Every part is essential to making the wheel work as intended, since, as whole people, all parts of our lives affect all other parts. A model with God at the center puts the events of life in proper perspective and helps us see all things as the means by which God is making us more like Christ. God doesn't get inserted into one portion of life; he holds each and every part of it together.



To keep God as our hub, we may need to change our patterns of life; at an even deeper level, we may need to change what we think we "need" to do and our motivations in doing some of those same things (e. g. fear-based parenting, educational choices, keeping long work hours for the sake of appearances, meeting unspoken family expectations, etc.). So how will we know we are doing the right things the right way? We can ask: Are we harming our families by working long hours? Should we look for a job for higher wages or move to a less costly neighborhood? Friends can give us wisdom on these things, but the ability to face the future without fear flows from trust that comes from God as the mediator of our callings. And because our God has promised answers when he is at the center of our lives and we seek his kingdom in what we do<sup>15</sup> these answers will become clear in his time, and more importantly we can face the future without fear as his children.

In the situations where we examined our surface and deep motivations above, did you jump in to 'fix' your problems out of fear of circumstances, respond in paralysis and/or depression, or let your relationship with God become arbiter of the decision process.

It may be that working sixty hours a week is okay this week and next week it is not. Maybe you'll need to work from home or find a different employer or career. Maybe your motivations need to change. Maybe what looks good Monday is not right on Tuesday because something else in life has changed radically. We can come alongside one another, and those around us, with mercy, humility and encouragement to live by faith because of the gospel. We don't have to offer the "right" answers or have insightful critique. But we can point one another to Christ and help each other trust God more deeply in the circumstances of our lives.

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew 6:24-34

## HOME EXERCISE LIFE INTEGRATION DIAGNOSTIC

Beneath our tendencies to striving and sloth are idolatries that can be dislodged by the Spirit as we ask questions that expose our hearts and look to the gospel for truthful answers and the power to change. Ultimately we want Christ to rule our schedules, lives, motivations, and hearts. Consider the following questions to ask yourself and then discuss with family members, coworkers and trusted friends.

### QUESTION SET 1

- How do I respond if I am criticized to make someone look better?
- What is my response when someone publicly critiques my work?
- What happens if someone overlooks my position or qualifications?
- What happens if I am not affirmed for the hours I spend at work?
- What if someone brings my competence, success or ability into question?
- Which of the above scenarios would get the biggest emotional response from me?

Do you see any pattern to your answers?

What might that pattern or system of beliefs be telling you?

### QUESTION SET 2

- How many hours do I “pretend” or fail to work in an average week?
- How much time do I spend pursuing get-rich-quick schemes?
- How often do I complain about being under-respected?
- Am I given enough resources to do my job? or underpaid for my work?
- Do I feel stuck in a dead-end position or lifestyle?
- Which of the above thoughts is the biggest emotional driver for me? Why?

Do you see any pattern to your answers?

What might that pattern or system of beliefs be telling you?

### QUESTION SET 3

- To Whom (or what) am I really entrusting my time? Future? Life?

- Is there anything underlying my answers in Question Sets 1 & 2 that makes me think I don't have options, so I have to put up with whatever situation my circumstances have placed me in?
- Am I giving my circumstances to God? Am I trusting him to be the hub of my life or am I giving him just a slice or two of my life's "pie"?
- Would I rather please God with my work or gain the praise of others?
- Do I trust God enough to let him disrupt my life if it enables me to know him more, serve others better or honor those I love?

## LESSON 6

### BOND-SERVANTS: FROM SLAVES TO SONS

#### BIG IDEA

In the New Testament we are told the story of Onesimus, a runaway slave who chose to return to the home of his master because of the gospel. We're not sure of the circumstances of Onesimus's leaving, but in his letter to Philemon, Paul speaks to the reasons for his return. Onesimus had become a follower of Jesus. For the first time, the fallen things that bound Onesimus - his history and former life - were left behind as he became a truly free man. Because Onesimus's master Philemon also claimed to be a believer, Paul urges him to receive Onesimus back, not as a slave, but as a brother. Because of the gospel, Philemon could no longer view Onesimus in the same way as before. No longer was Onesimus to be defined primarily by his work; instead he now knew he reflected the image of God and was to pattern his life after God. Both men were now freed from their former relationship and were called to serve their Redeemer Jesus together.

This is our story as well. Some of us have been freed from a love of money, others from self-righteousness or self-importance and others from self-hatred. We are all new people who owe our lives to Jesus. As we grow in the gospel, we grow in gratitude and want to follow and worship the One who has freed us and given us new life! Our Savior doesn't treat us as workers, valued for only what we do, but instead as family members who are loved for who we are! Our identity as sons and daughters (established through God's work, rather than our own) is what empowers us to carry out the tasks of life with great passion. For that reason, what we do— even our roles and titles—never defines who we are in Christ. Because of our bond and relationship to Jesus, whom we belong to and serve matters more than what we do. Rather than our work becoming our identity, the gospel offers us true personhood as trusted members of God's family.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

- Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passage(s)
- Article: *The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work*
- Discussion: Process *The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work*
- Home Exercise: *From Law Demands to Love Commands*
- Wrap Up: Final thoughts and prayer

#### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Throughout the New Testament Christ's followers refer to themselves as Bond-servants— those who live under Christ's authority and who desire to serve and represent him in all they do. Just as we do in marriage, bond-servants choose to voluntarily integrate their identity with the identity of someone they love, for better or worse. Peter calls himself a BondServant of Jesus Christ in 2 Peter 1:1, Paul says the same in Romans 1:1,

James in James 1:1, Jude in Jude 1, and finally John in Revelation 1:1.<sup>16</sup> These men all start their letters to the church with a declaration of their bond-service to Jesus, which should make us wonder what the idea meant to them and how it can impact us.

#### SETUP

Just like sons and daughters, Christ's BondServants are compelled by love into a relationship with their Redeemer, whom they serve not because they must, but because they desire to let Christ do his will through them, instead of living for themselves. Like adopted orphans, BondServants were former slaves trapped in desperate circumstances that cost them their lives and freedom – owing a great debt which resulted in their slavery. And just like the Father who adopts, the BondServants Redeemer comes and pays the price of the slave's redemption. The slave whose debts are paid has a unique choice – to either stay and work for the master out of love and gratitude, or leave pursue a life on their own.

Those who had been mistreated or lived in fear of retaliation will not choose to become BondServants that stay and work alongside others out of gratitude—they know nothing but slavery from their master. BondServants are only those who know the depths from which they have been redeemed, and also a deep love that has redeemed them.

Because of the gospel, men and women are being freed from idolatry and bondage to sin and, in gratitude to the freedom purchased by God, strive to live lives worthy of the gospel. As sons, we owe our lives to for Christ and if we choose to freely serve become willing BondServants of our savior. As those who gladly follow his will, we are compelled to love and serve those around us because we know what it was like to be enslaved to ourselves and the world, and we now also know the freedom that comes in our liberation from that bondage.

Let's look at three passages that deal with moving from slavery to freedom in Christ. We'll start with the parable of the talents. This might seem like an odd place to start, but we want to examine it as a negative example, to think about the motivations of the unfaithful servant.

**READ:** Matthew 25:14-30. Keep in mind that a talent was roughly equivalent to the wages of an average worker over the course of his lifetime.

**ASK:** Is there a reason given why the servants were entrusted with different quantities?

**ASK:** In the gospel, what kind of ability (v. 15) do you think God measures us by?

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<sup>16</sup> (Note: Modern translations like NIV and ESV translate *doulos* as **servant** throughout, for fear of misunderstanding and negative associations with the term BondServant. BondServant is a more precise translation of the original text, which we'll delve into more deeply in this chapter.)

LEADER'S NOTE: Don't spend a tremendous amount of time trying to define ability here. There are two important things to note from the passage as it relates to the two questions. (1) The master does not treat his servants equally and (2) those who were praised for their ability to invest their lifetime's worth of resources were told, "Well done, good and faithful servants." So their ability seems to be correlated to their capacity to serve the master faithfully in the tasks given them. The master doesn't expect faithfulness to exceed the resources he has given them.

ASK: What is the stated reason that the last servant hid his talents rather than investing what he had been given to develop the master's interests?

ASK: Do you think the last servant knew and understood the master?  
(Hint: Was he grateful for and did he risk what he'd been given?)

Now let's turn to one of the Apostle Paul's statements on the nature of his Bond-servanthood and its relation to the gospel.

READ: Galatians 1:9-12

ASK: What does Paul seek as a BondServant? What doesn't he seek?

ASK: What is Paul's attitude towards those who proclaim the necessity to serve God out of fear, to try to earn his approval? What is his attitude towards those who please men out of fear, in an attempt to win their approval? How are these related?

ASK: What is Paul's stated attitude in all he does?

LEADER'S NOTE: Those who serve out of a fear of man or who try to earn God's approval are putting themselves under a curse. Both are impossible tasks that will lead to one's ultimate destruction rather than salvation. The only real path Paul sees is serving Christ in gratitude for what he's done.

TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: We want to think more deeply about the implications of serving Christ in gratitude by reading ***The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work.***

## ARTICLE

Turn to the article ***The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work*** in the Participant's Guide and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

## DISCUSSION

Let's think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: How is gratitude for the gospel as a motivation different from guilt or a desire to try and earn our righteousness?

ASK: Have you ever been compelled to go beyond what was required of you because of the Spirit's prompting? What did that look like?

ASK: Where do you think God might be prompting you to go above and beyond what is required of you in a relationship or circumstance?

HOME EXERCISE: In *The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work*, we've been talking about motivations for work. Help diagnose the motivations in your life by working through your personal reflections in *From Law Demands to Love Commands*.

TURN TO: Your individual copies of the worksheet *From Law Demands to Love Commands*.

WRAP UP: Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

# THE FREEDOM OF SERVING GOD IN OUR WORK

How does the gospel free us to not just “do the right things” in our daily work, but to genuinely love God and others so that we seek their good—even when we disagree with them or know that they might be doing something wrong—actions and activities that we would characterize as unethical, illegal or even immoral? Being “gospel-centered” is more than following an accepted code of ethics or the stated values of an organization. It means reflecting God’s character and loving others while standing up for the right and the good—in ways that are beyond what we are capable of unless we rely on God. It usually involves risking ourselves for the sake of others. We need to ask God for a grasp of the gospel that produces greater faith in him than in our functional idols, fear of men, or the motivations and values at play in our places of daily work.

- Do I believe that God will take care of me as my true master? Or do I opt for self-preservation? I should trust God enough to be appropriately transparent to those around me, rather than fearful over the norms and pressures of my work.
- Do I have faith that the gospel is enough for what I need? Can I therefore resist the crowd, even at personal cost or loss? What price am I willing to bear to let the gospel flourish? What is God calling me to in my current circumstances?
- Do I rely on my righteousness or God’s? Our desire for external righteousness always tempts us to try and look better than others. We can be real sticklers about following the rules or looking down on those who don’t get it right.
- Do I trust Jesus enough to let him transform me through the hard circumstances of my work? He is our true master, and teaches us how to do his will on earth as it is in heaven. We enter into Jesus rest by trusting him and refusing to trust ourselves. There is no rest in self-trust. When we deny ourselves, and choose to trust Christ we receive the rest found in the gospel.

God loved us on the cross through the life death and resurrection of Jesus, by giving us access to the power of the gospel in the midst of daily circumstances. He loved us by making us and knowing us, but he also loved us when we were his enemies. On the cross, he changed us to love him and his character—the things he represents like truth, honesty, integrity, and goodness. This change gives us the power to love others, to seek their benefit, and to even bless our enemies in the midst of their debt.

As we live out of gratitude for the generosity we’ve experienced, others will long to know our heavenly Father. As we think more deeply about God’s generosity to us, let’s look at the origins of biblical servanthood in Deuteronomy 15:15-17 (NIV). This image is the basis for our understanding of its fuller meaning in the New Testament.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.

But if your servant says to you, “I do not want to leave you,” because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe

into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.

The BondServant would allow his master to pierce his earlobe with an awl against the door of the house. That's a very clear statement that you are staying in that home; by the power of blood you're permanently attached to this household and this master. As a mark of the bond of love and its value, it became the practice to put in a gold earring after the awl was removed. With a simple voluntary act, the servant would be swearing by his own life-blood to never be free again, nor could he ever be sold. These servants were no longer serving out of debt, but were now there because of their own desire to be beloved members of the master's house who would be permanently cared for. Now, serving as a trusted integral part of the household, these employees would usually become stewards of much more of their master's affairs than typical servants would be. Although still servants, they were treated more like members of the family and given much greater freedom, mutual affection and responsibility.

The desire to become part of the master's household flows from a love and understanding of the master's generosity. The freed man or woman who becomes a BondServant experiences something so great in this relationship that he or she is willing to put themselves at risk. What a beautiful reality! When we experience true freedom in the gospel, our natural response is gratitude and a desire to serve the kind of master who pays our debts, puts all his resources at our disposal, and gives us his family name. As sons and daughters who bear our Father's image and experience joy in the gospel, we should be compelled to serve one another in God's household. Galatians 5:13 says that because of the gospel, we have new freedom in Christ and we should use that freedom as servants bound to one another in love. The gratitude that comes from our freedom should compel us to become enslaved again, this time to be captivated by loving one another!

- At the cross we are truly accepted. We are enabled to approach God as friends and sons, rather than enemies. At the cross we are truly forgiven, for Christ has taken away our debt and done for us what we could never do for ourselves. At the cross, we are made truly righteous; in exchange for our sin, Christ has given us his righteousness.
- Because we are loved as sons and daughters and given the resources of our Father's household, we're compelled to serve in joy. This means we are free to pursue the things God loves in all we do, bearing his image and imitating him with honesty, justice, integrity, compassion and generosity. Work flows from a grateful understanding of God's work on our behalf, leading us to love God by obeying his commands and working out his will rather than fearing men.
- As BondServants we treat the law differently. The law now becomes a friend and guide that separate a wide range of freedom and safety motivated by the Spirit of God from the dangers of serving our own appetites and fears. My righteousness is now not about sinning less, but responding to God's grace to love others more.
- The gospel opens up the reality of living life in the Spirit. Because the demands of the law have been met in Christ, we're free to move beyond them to live in the light, using the abilities God has given us. We act in freedom rather than fear.

As an example of living with joy in the wide range of freedom we find beyond the law, let's think about the widow in Mark 12:44. She not only gave a tenth of her income; she gave all she had. Barnabas in Acts 4:36-37 sold his property and gave all the proceeds to the church. What compelled such extravagant and radical action? Finally, consider Paul, who in 1Corinthians 9 lists all the rights he has given up so that he can share the gospel with the Corinthians without charge. Paul argued that he had a right to be paid, but was under the Spirit's compulsion not to be. All believers should want to live with such passion and gratitude for Christ. We should pursue reliance on the Spirit to go beyond what the law requires to do even greater things by faith. When our words and actions are motivated by faith that overflows from and into a greater passion for God, we find true joy and life.

All of us have seen unrighteousness plotted, displayed and exalted. The Spirit will most certainly lead us to avoid participating in those wrongs (or to repent of any wrongs in which we find ourselves entrapped). God's law shows us clearly what not to do, but it is powerless to show us what *to* do. But in those moments, the Spirit may ask us to go beyond the law to love in the name and power of Jesus.

- An accountant who is asked to cook the books needs to do the right thing before God and also care for others, which means putting himself at risk to speak the truth, protest the wrong and refuse to cooperate for the sake of his co-workers and customers.
- The lawyer who is tempted to destroy opposing council and press for the maximum penalty just to continue to gain a personal reputation for being tough on crime, is confronted with the reality of a penitent defendant and realizes that mercy may also at times be required. He must choose between serving self, and seeing someone's life transformed for better.
- The stay-at-home mom who is pressured to shun another mom whose children are out of control risks being shunned herself if she does the right thing by befriending the family.
- The student who is thinking of switching majors because they know their motivations for career have been to be completely self-reliant, in an area they don't have much passion for considers doing something completely radical where they will need to be more dependent on God in their work.

What does our gratitude for Christ's love and our new-found freedoms compel us to do? What does the law say you should *not* do and what does the Spirit show you that love demands? Perhaps your dilemma involves a business deal, advertising campaign, or accounting practice; perhaps it involves how your children are treating a friend, or an enemy; you may be aware of a student who is cheating on exams under parental pressure to get good grades. Whatever it is, the Spirit may be compelling you to do more than just live for your own righteousness. The Spirit does not just teach our consciences right from wrong; it compels us to rely on his power to create, change, redeem, restore and beautify our world for the sake of God's glory.

## HOME EXERCISE FROM LAW DEMANDS TO LOVE COMMANDS

At work we can often be more concerned about what the law demands—staying out of trouble—than about going beyond the law to love people as we've been loved. This exercise can help you move beyond pretending and performing to moving into relationships and circumstances with love. Try it and see what happens over the next week! See the example below for guidance in how to fill out the chart.

- A stay-at-home mom might focus on a child's outward behavior rather than her heart attitude or disposition. A tired father might focus on enjoying himself, not making waves in relationships at home or with siblings, parents and neighbors.
- Students might be focused on getting good grades at the expense of truly knowing a subject or topic. Such a focus might tempt them to cheat, cut corners or over-prepare in fear rather than understanding knowledge and enjoying its application.
- A salesman may tend to focus more of his energy on trashing his competition including using false allusions and hearsay about competitors, rather than wanting to communicate and compete on both the strengths and limitations of his company's products or services.

The questions below ask you to discuss examples of "law issues"—What are the expectations placed on me in my work and daily environment?—and associated "love issues"— Where are we called to love God and others better in specific circumstances? You'll need to reflect on your own example or case study here and then reflect daily on how you looked at issues and circumstances.

To get started, move from column 1 to column 2 and ask, "What if the expectations in my day changed so that my number one job was to love God and the people around me in this particular circumstance (vs. just doing the basics of my job)? What would be different?"

| Situation   | What My Job Expects   | What a Love for God and Others might require beyond What My Job Expects   |
|---|---|---|
| <p><u>Example</u><br/>A teammate, family member or close friend makes a mistake</p> | <p><u>Some Possible "Law Only" Responses:</u><br/>I help the company succeed, so I might address the situation but also cover it up.</p> <p>I make my opinion known first to my teammate and then my boss if needed (to shade things so I look best).</p> <p>I come up with the best way to fix mistakes (and draw the maximum glory towards my abilities).</p> | <p><u>Possible "Love God and Others" Responses:</u><br/>I speak up, but I do so knowing I'm prone to make mistakes, and God still loves me.</p> <p>I work with my teammate to truly try and help him as opposed to scoring points.</p> <p>I'm concerned about how a mistake could harm customers or someone else; I'm not just fixing it so I can move on.</p> <p>When tempted to judge a teammate for being negligent, I'm reminded that Christ has established my record and does not unfairly judge my competency, nor do so in shame.</p> |

| <b>Situation</b> | <b>What My Job Expects</b> | <b>What a Love for God and Others</b><br>might require beyond What My Job Expects |
|------------------|----------------------------|---|
|                  |                            |   |

# LESSON 7

## STEWARDS: SERVING JESUS THROUGH NEIGHBORS

### BIG IDEA

To live as a Steward in God's kingdom means that the people, circumstances, interruptions and events in our day are no accident and certainly no surprise to God. Everything we have (abilities, position, and resources, etc.) has been given to us by God to be used for his glory. Even in life's emergencies, God wants us to use his resources as a grateful response to him.

We've already seen that our work is a great way to respond to God in worship and gratitude for all we've been given in Christ. We want to think through some implications of what it means to have been entrusted with God's resources for God's glory. Just as Jesus was incarnate in a specific physical place and time with particular relationships, so we live as God's children in many of the same ways. Much like the Good Samaritan who loved his neighbor by responding faithfully with the resources he was given, so we are called to faithfully respond to the opportunities God gives us each day to serve and please him by serving others.

No opportunity enters our lives that is not given by God. He wants us to represent him in ways that bring him glory and impact others with good works and the gospel. The Greek word for *Steward* is closely tied to the idea of being an agent—someone who is given resources and opportunities to carry out someone else's mission and purposes. Today, this idea lies behind the work of real estate agents, insurance agents and secret agents. These modern stewards are equipped to act within a specific context to promote the interests of a known other. We respond to the circumstances God gives us in ways that can conform to God's will or be opposed to it. God's provision for us as his children transforms our orphan attitudes about resources like time and money to uncover ways to seek the good of others with everything he has entrusted to us, as service to our Savior.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

- Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passage(s)
- Article: *Three Aspects of Stewardship*
- Discussion: Process concepts of *Three Aspects of Stewardship*
- Home Exercise: *My Agenda, God's Agenda*
- Wrap Up: Final thoughts and prayer

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

One underlying attitude of consumerism is to value people only for what they do or contribute to society. For all the benefits that come from a perspective of personal responsibility and freedom in having more choices than we could have imagined, such a system also creates a world of pride and shame in our workplaces, homes, neighborhoods and schools. Such a system exerts a tremendous pressure to perform because we're rewarded according to our next success or failure. Participants in such a system cut

corners to win at all costs and use others for personal advantage. When we rely on our accomplishments instead of Christ, we worship ourselves and rarely share credit, overcome jealousy, or put the needs of others above our own. Believers who do so are buying into a form of works-righteousness to their peril. Such a motivational system can completely overturn and cut us off from biblical reality.

#### SETUP

To hold fast to our core identity as God's beloved children means that we look to him for our provision, trust him with our future, and ask him to guide our daily actions. Being identified as God's beloved frees us to put the needs of others before our own and to celebrate their strengths and accomplishments, because we know we will always be taken care of by our heavenly Father. Who we are is tied to Christ's righteousness and provision rather than our own merit or personal performance. Gratitude for God's love and Christ's work on our behalf is the motivating force for our work and daily life.

Let's look at two passages that consider the idea of being a servant in the kingdom of God, one from Jesus and one from Paul. The first passage highlights a teaching from Jesus that follows a discussion on who should be the greatest leader in the coming kingdom.

READ      John 12:23-28

**LEADER'S NOTE:** The critical thing to note in this John 12 passage is that we need to die to ourselves and embrace the mission of Jesus to truly be fruitful in this world.

ASK:      Jesus starts his teaching on glory and servanthood by saying that a seed needs to die to be fruitful. What does this have to do with serving and glory?

ASK:      Jesus says that his Father will honor the one who serves him. What do you think that means for us as believers? What kind of honor is Jesus talking about?

ASK:      Jesus says he has a choice between being saved from this hour and glorifying the name of the Father. Why are these opposites for him?

ASK:      How is this concept true for us as we serve others in ways that glorify God?

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:4-11

**LEADERS NOTE:** Don't get wrapped up in Paul's and Apollos's roles here. Paul is explaining that their work was built on Christ work, and that is what ultimately will make the difference. We all work alongside God and certainly do not need to compete with one another for credit or for the fields in which we labor as believers.

ASK: What does it mean that “neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything”?

ASK: Similarly, what does it mean that “he who plants and he who waters are one”?

ASK: How are we all God's fellow workers?

ASK: How is the work of Jesus our foundation?

#### TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: *Three Aspects of Stewardship*

In Mark 7:31 Jesus returns to Decapolis, where he previously had cast out evil spirits from a possessed man and sent them into a herd of pigs, which then plunged over a cliff. Jesus urged the healed man to return to his household. This time Jesus was warmly welcomed (compared to the first time, when he was run off by an angry mob). We don't know all that happened between the two visits, but we can assume that the demoniac—now visibly and radically changed to be in his right mind, restored to a normal daily life—was one thing that made a difference. Instead of Jesus encouraging this man to leave the familiar to follow him, Jesus told him to stay and be transformed where he was.

In the next article, we'll see how our gratitude for Christ's work is a necessary precursor to being used as servants who display his glory, Stewards in the kingdom of God representing Christ and his work on our behalf.

ARTICLE: Turn to the article ***Three Aspects of Stewardship*** in the Participant's Guide and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

#### DISCUSSION

ASK: How are the visible qualities of a transformed life a catalyst for God's glory?

ASK: How is it true that we must be united to Christ as BondServants before we are truly able to grow into the role of being his Stewards in his kingdom?

ASK: What are some ways that your daily life is “a chief laboratory of the gospel”?

ASK: Do you agree that, as Stewards, joy is only possible when we willingly submit to Jesus serving us with his grace? Why is this so hard for us?

TURN TO: We're beginning to see and discuss ways that we might be motivated to serve ourselves in the actions and activities of our day, rather than serving God. Turn to your weekly exercise **My Agenda, God's Agenda** that helps us see the ways our daily activities

often connect to ways God may be serving us or wanting to serve the world through us. Use this exercise to understand larger patterns in how God might be using you in your daily circumstances and desiring to change you through them.

TURN TO: The exercise *My Agenda, God's Agenda*.

WRAP UP: Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

# THREE ASPECTS OF STEWARDSHIP

The gospel changes our outlook to help us serve others in ways Jesus has served us. Whether we are leading, following, or collaborating with others, God has entrusted each of us with an area of responsibility that parallels God's provision and rule in the world. As believers, we share in God's oversight through our stewardship of resources and relationships. We do this for the sake of others and the glory of God. We can love and serve others unconditionally because we've been loved and served unconditionally ourselves. Yes, we work out of gratitude for Jesus and his love but, more importantly, we are told by Jesus that we serve and care for him when we serve others in his name.<sup>17</sup>

There are many implications to this spiritual reality. In a gospel-centered community, businesspeople compete knowing that other suppliers are not the enemy and customers are not merely to be manipulated for personal gain. Advertisers make truth claims about products because they operate in relationships of trust with consumers. Housewives love their husbands and children with gratitude despite trying circumstances. Students approach face exams as legitimate judges of what they know and don't know. They trust in God for their success, rather than living in the fear and shame of consequences. The list is endless. This serving out of a knowledge and trust of God is what the New Testament calls being a *diakonos* or steward. Stewards carry out the wishes or will of an authority, literally becoming *dustkickers*— those who "kick up the dust" as they do the bidding of someone wiser or with more authority, who directs their steps with a vision for a long-term plan of action. (Remember the parable of the talents in Matthew 25, where the two servants were commended because they trusted rather than feared the master. The third servant acted out of a flawed knowledge of the master.) So our plans and actions are not our own as Stewards; they are always submitted to the Lord to bring about his purposes in history. Stewards are always stirring up the dust for God's glory.

*At age 20, Wendy Clark started Carpe Diem Cleaners. Initially her sense of what it meant to be a Christian businessperson was that her firm could generate profits - and then give away those profits generously to cross cultural missions organizations. Several years into her career Jesus opened her eyes to see that her business itself was also a ministry and form of service for God and her community. Now when she goes to work, she knows that she is serving God, not just by giving money away (that's a secondary benefit), but more importantly by serving her clients and her employees. That reality has radically changed how she runs her business. In addition to serving her customers in a relationship of trust, Wendy now views her employees differently. She is able to see her employees as people and now serves those employees, mostly Latino moms, with flexible work schedules that value the reality of their other callings as wives and moms.*

*Carpe Diem's hours now accommodate their schedules "so that they aren't stressed out trying to get their kids to school, running late to work, and getting home on time." Instead of holding training sessions in the city, she changed the format of her service education events by taking the women - and their kids - to a family camp outside of town in the country. That way, she gets everyone's full attention and the families get a special vacation they probably*

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<sup>17</sup> Mark 9:41, Matthew 10:42

wouldn't have had otherwise. She ends up serving not just her employees but their whole households as well.<sup>18</sup>

The gospel enables us to repent from seeing ourselves as orphans—as those who are abandoned and without resources—to change our perspective on our circumstances so that we operate in partnership with our heavenly Father, to look beyond ourselves and see others as he has made them. When we rest in our status as God's beloved children, we flourish, and the communities and institutions where God has placed us are impacted by our service and influence. The gospel helps us repent of the self-centeredness and self-righteousness that might have taken the resources entrusted to us and turn them inward in arrogance and fear. Instead, because we are loved, we see that the resources of time, energy, and relationship are given to be "stewarded" for the sake of the kingdom; they are not things we earn or deserve. Stewards also are given authority to rule, manage, and oversee within a particular realm because the gospel has changed them to serve others rather than themselves.

In Colossians 4:7, Paul calls Tychicus both a faithful Steward (*diakonos*) and BondServant (*doulos*). Used together, these terms help us draw some distinctions. Remember our starting point: BondServants love God with their whole being to trust him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. All the love they have come to know—all that they have become and all that they have been given—is returned to God in worship and service to others. Our relationship to and reliance on Jesus is a prerequisite for serving neighbors in his name. 'BondService' is the Godward or inward component built on the Father's great love for us that fuels the neighborly 'Stewardship' or outward component of our service for God towards others. In Colossians 4 we see those who call themselves BondServants growing as Stewards who have been entrusted with more resources and responsibility as growing faithful leaders. Matthew 4 is a haunting passage in this regard, that points to people who think they are serving him, but in actuality are serving themselves. This should be a warning that it is not our stewardship that is primary, but our being united to Jesus that is foundational in serving our neighbors. Jesus must be the one who oversees and empowers our stewardship and also becomes its object. That is, when we love our neighbors as God's stewards in neighborhood, workplace, and home life, as his people that stewardship is transformed into worship out of gratitude for Jesus' provision. It is the fruit in our lives that bears witness to the reality of our being in him. Just as we see in the story of the sheep and the goats<sup>19</sup> and Colossians 3:22-24, Jesus is the ultimate recipient of our work, which is a great spiritual encouragement to us if our desire is to glorify him, more than our own position, reputation or reward.

There are three ways our stewardship is reflected in relationships to neighbors.

**Stewardship means we're sent into daily life as God's Agents.** As God's agents we represent someone larger than ourselves as we operate under God's provision and care. Like the demoniac, God has placed us where we live and sends us out to be his hands and feet, his eyewitnesses and his voice. We have been given all that we have to steward as salt and light in the world, meant to preserve its good and expose its evil so people can

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<sup>18</sup> Adapted from <http://www.crosswalk.com/family/career/vocational-stewardship-for-the-common-good.html> by Amy Sherman and [www.carpediemcleaning.com/mission-vision/](http://www.carpediemcleaning.com/mission-vision/)

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 25

repent and be transformed. As Stewards who live for God's glory, we don't work to own or earn what we have. It is for the love of neighbor and the advancement and fame of God's name and kingdom. Don Flow, CEO of Flow Motor Corporation in Winston Salem talks about the motivation to honor God that drives his business. Flowing from that desire is a fixed price model that prides itself on service and building up long term relationships with its customers

*"I thought about an academic career, but doing what I am doing was as natural for me as a pastor being called to preach in the pulpit. Loving that person that walks beside you is just an abstraction - I knew lots of Christians who talked about love all the time and they were horrible to work with. This is like a complete anomaly. I have this passion to make it real in practice - I'm not talking about preaching to those who work for me, to customers or others. I'm not talking about favoring Christians who work here. I want to respect and value all people, regardless of their beliefs. But I am talking about living out the implications of what I believe. This is reflected in how we treat people, what our practices are and what we think is important."<sup>20</sup>*

**Stewardship recognizes that God is able to use our neighbor's actions for good.** Jesus said that when we love those around us in his name, we are loving him. If we are generous and give when we cannot be repaid, our heavenly Father will see what we do in secret and reward us. When we lay up treasure in heaven, when we care for others on earth who may persecute, reject and dismiss us, When we love our enemies, God is being glorified! In such circumstances God is more concerned with purifying our character and heart motivation – seeing us be transformed to be more like Christ – than he is by our particular actions. He sees our hearts and transforms our desires to serve him in all we do. The truth of the gospel frees us to boldly live for others rather than ourselves. Think about Joseph who was ridiculed, kidnapped, and then sold into slavery by his brothers. He then was falsely accused of seducing his boss's wife, to later spend several years in prison, all because of the sinful actions of his brothers. Yet God provided for him, and molded him to become a great man, after God's own image.

*In his providence, God was never thwarted by human action. Joseph could have been angry and even wanted justice towards his brothers. But when he finally comes face to face with them again, meeting them in a position of power over them and their lives, he says "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."<sup>21</sup>*

**We become Stewards of the Gospel, sent from God to our neighbors.** As we love our neighbors well, eventually they may recognize that God is caring for them through us, as if we were his hands and feet. When we appropriately share the gospel verbally, they may come to know Jesus' great love and respond in faith, welcoming God as their Father and provider. In Ephesians 3:7 and Colossians 1:23, Paul calls himself a steward of the gospel. His whole life has been reoriented to bring good news to the cities and Gentile believers entrusted to him. He had been a slave to sin and self-righteousness, but is now a BondServant of Jesus and a Steward of the gospel among those who don't know God. Stewards recognize that there are no ordinary people or things. All that is created bears the image of God and points to him as

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<sup>20</sup> <http://ethix.org/2004/04/01/ethics-at-flow-automotive>

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 50:19-20

significant revelations of the Creator. God gives us all we have to glorify him by loving our neighbors and bring the reality of the gospel to bear on their lives.

*In a recent breakfast meeting, Trupoint Marketing CEO Matt Lievens says "I really owe much of this business to my coworker and partner Jill. She really helps me see people. I go about my day, executing, making decision, seeing things rationally. But she regularly asks us to look under the surface to see people for who they could be, and to see how they are trapped by the fears. Part of being a solutions company means that we help free people .....*

So these three distinct aspects summarize the way God is reshaping the world as he reshapes our character as Stewards over his resources. God knows that our character is changed as we delight in the kinds of Stewardship that flows from reliance on him. The problems and people we encounter are opportunities to be reshaped by Christ through the gospel, and to bring the knowledge of God into the places of service he has entrusted to us.

Some people seek out ways to publicly serve God, but if we take the parable of the sheep and the goats seriously, it is the indirect and hidden ways of serving others that are singled out as truly Christian work. We may be very surprised on the last day, as we see God honor the small things done with great love, hidden from the world's eyes, but performed faithfully in response to Jesus' work in our lives. Jesus wants to meet us in our work in ways we cannot anticipate or control. He meets us there in the people around us to orchestrate his purposes, both in our lives and in the lives of others, to grow us in faith. Asking for a knowledge of his presence and discernment of our circumstances is critical if we are to live faithfully each day.

We need the gift of faith to submit our days to him and steward our circumstances. Even the desire to want more of God, to let him increase as we decrease, is a gift from him. It is much different from wanting to improve our record before God or seeking more fulfillment in our work. To let him transform our character with the fruits of his Spirit; to trust completely in his record—all this comes as a gift of faith. God's gifts always transform our character and thus change our actions. Without faith, duty and obligation are what motivate us, and a life lived by sheer will power is a life lived without joy. Trusting in God's provision even amid the hard and mundane is a pathway to greater joy. Only when there is no spotlight or personal ministry opportunity, can we set our agenda aside and humbly accept the interruptions God brings our way. Only then do we allow our wills to be submitted to Jesus as he serves through us, by his power and with his grace.

Interruptions from difficult and unlovable coworkers, bosses, clients, students, patients, children and relatives give us a chance to practice repentance and faith. When we are given grace to see our orphan self-centeredness, the Spirit gives us grace to repent and step out in faith, to love others as God has loved us. The irritations and stressors we once overcame in the least painful way or simply avoided now become opportunities to serve Christ and repent of our sin. The relationships of our workplace are one of the "chief laboratories of the gospel" where God is glorified as we are refined and transformed.

## EXERCISE

### MY AGENDA, GOD'S AGENDA

This exercise builds on the previous lesson's exercise. ***From Law Demands and Love Commands*** encouraged you to look back on your day and reflect on the motivations you had amid the chaos of daily life. This time we would like you to *anticipate* and ask God to show you what he might have in store for you each day.

Start by writing down a "To Do" list at the beginning of each day. Review that list in the evening and write down what God *actually* had for you that day.

In addition, create a "Done For" list of the ways God worked through others to serve you as his beloved child. Repeat the exercise by writing a new list each day. Every day use your list to turn your priorities over to God. Reflect on how your "To Do" and "Done For" lists take on a changed perspective and growth in gratitude and outlook during the course of the week. What did God do within your heart, soul and mind as the week progressed?

How do your "To Do" and "Done For" lists reveal how you think about Stewardship—how God can use the opportunities in your life to grow you and enable you to serve others?

#### TO DO

*Example: Please help me in my attitude towards my coworker Jamie. I know that he can push my buttons with his self-centeredness and whining. Help me not to lose my patience with him again.*

#### DONE FOR

*Example: Father in heaven, thanks for renewing my perspective on my coworker and seeing him with fresh eyes. God you really helped me see how to relate and serve him when I saw him as you made him. He has many needs in the face of long suffering circumstances.*

# LESSON 8

## AMBASSADORS: REPRESENTATIVES SENT BY GOD

### BIG IDEA

God has gifted each of us uniquely to point others to the gospel and Jesus' power to restore all things. He equips us as his partners and as scientists, teachers, engineers, students, homemakers –in whatever sphere he calls us to serve. In addition to reflecting and serving him in our work, we can also reach those around us with the gospel.

We are former rebels who now are redeemed citizens of heaven, and God has surrounded us with neighbors, coworkers, fellow students, and family members. He gives us daily opportunities to display a life reconciled to God and to point others to his power to do the same for them. The Bible calls us God's "Ambassadors." As Ambassadors we represent God and his kingdom, speak with his authority as heirs with Christ, and offer his forgiveness to others.

We are people who were once separated from God and in need of the gospel; now we represent him as we go to others in the power of his reconciliation. As we go with the gospel, we reconcile brokenness. We forget our own welfare and embrace our calling to extend God's kingdom. As we go with the gospel we rest in God's provision, authority and power. When we view everyday life and work through gospel lenses, instead of seeing others with competition or judgment, we see our neighbors as God sees them—broken people who need Jesus just as much as we do.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passage(s)

Article: *Becoming Ambassadors*

Discussion: Process concepts of *Becoming Ambassadors*

Home Exercise: *People of Peace and Hospitality*

Wrap Up: Final thoughts and prayer

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Through the power of the gospel, God is changing us right where we are, so we can bring him glory as his ambassadors wherever he has placed us. He sends each of us into circumstances, places and relationships where he wants to be made known. Second Corinthians 5 says that we are Christ's ambassadors, and that God makes his appeal to others through our words and actions. Through our presence we compel those around us to be reconciled to God. We do the groundwork of being in relationship with them and Jesus promises to show up in the middle of that everyday relationship. The New Testament word translated "ambassador" is *presbeuomen* which, along with similar words like elder and (de)legate, assumes that we are God's representatives, acting on behalf of God and his people rather than looking to our own interests.

## SETUP

One of the blessings of life wherever God has placed us is the opportunity to play a vital part in reconciling people to God. God has entrusted us with opportunities for service and a message of reconciliation. Just as much as those around us need the gospel, we too need the gift of repentance to see our need of the gospel each day. How does the way I've been treated and loved affect my view of others' circumstances? How does God view those around me? What is their greatest need, and how can I love them as I've been loved?

Let's look at a few passages that describe our role as everyday Ambassadors. We will consider how shedding our tendency towards competitiveness and judgment changes us into people of peace and hospitality. We'll begin by looking at Jesus sending out the seventy-two; then we'll see what Paul says about living as reconcilers as he modeled Ambassadorship in the marketplace at Corinth.

READ: Luke 10:1-11

ASK: What characterizes this sending of new disciples by Jesus?  
Why do you think he tells them not to take supplies for their journey?

ASK: What two things does Jesus tell his disciples to say to those who welcomed them? How are these two things significant?

LEADER'S NOTE: Jesus wanted the disciples to rely on their heavenly Father in all things and to look for people who were open to the gospel and hospitable to strangers. As they got to know these men and women in their homes, these relationships would provide a "home away from home" for future travels as the disciples journeyed with Jesus.

ASK: Are the disciples held responsible for the responses they receive from those they meet? Why is this important?

LEADER'S NOTE: God only holds the disciples responsible for their own faithfulness, living in openness to God's provision in all circumstances.

We have looked at how Jesus prepared his disciples for future journeys into the contexts of different cities and towns throughout Judea. Now, let's see what Paul the tentmaker says about Ambassadorship in the kingdom of God.

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

ASK: Is reconciliation an absence of conflict or something more?  
What reconciliation have we received?

LEADER'S NOTE: Reconciliation is not just the absence of conflict; it includes the presence of deep relationship and trust, and more importantly the resolution of conflict. When we reconcile we restore something that previously existed but was broken.

ASK: How does trusting in God qualify us to be gospel-centered reconcilers?

LEADER'S NOTE: The gospel has helped us die to ourselves so that we can live and speak for Christ. Just as we are no longer viewed with judgment, so we can view others with a gospel perspective of who they are in Christ.

ASK: Verse 16 says that we no longer have a “fleshly” or earthly perspective on anyone. In what ways does this change how we interact with everyone?

LEADER'S NOTE: We need to help people grapple with their changed status in the gospel and never treat them according to the flesh or allow them to be defined by their past. We need to welcome and not condemn those who desire the freedom from sin found in the gospel. We need to call others to participate in the new creation of which we're now a part.

ASK: Verse 19 says that in Christ God is doing two things:  
(1) reconciling the world to himself and (2) entrusting us with the message of reconciliation. What is the “message of reconciliation” entrusted to us?

#### TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: *Becoming Ambassadors*

ARTICLE: Turn to the article ***Becoming Ambassadors*** in the Participant's Guide and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

#### DISCUSSION

ASK: Do you think it is important to spend time cultivating relationships with both believers and unbelievers?

ASK: Are there ways that comparing yourself with others (either competing with them or looking down on them) prevents you from authentic living?

ASK: How are you perceived by your coworkers, neighbors, or classmates? Would they say you are a person of peace and welcome or personally competitive and defensive?

ASK: What are some ways you can hold more tightly to the passive righteousness of Christ so that you are freed from the need to judge and compete with others?

ASK: What are some simple but significant ways to bless those you spend time with at work, home, neighborhood or school? What specific actions could you take to build others up, rather than compete with them or tear them down?

HOME EXERCISE: We've begun thinking about our personal motivations and resources for sharing our faith with the people God puts in our lives. *People of Peace and Hospitality* helps us assess the ways pride or shame can keep us from sharing our faith with others.

TURN TO: your copy of the exercise *People of Peace and Hospitality*.

WRAP UP: Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

# BECOMING AMBASSADORS

Jonah is one of the Bible's best examples of someone called by God to go and love his enemies. But Jonah was more than just reluctant—he was boldly disobedient! Left to our own resources, we probably wouldn't look much different. Jonah preferred death over going to an enemy as God's ambassador of peace, forgiveness and repentance. He wanted God to judge and destroy the Ninevites. When a storm disrupted his flight in the opposite direction and his actions were revealed, Jonah convinced a bunch of sailors to assist him in his suicide. He literally had to die to himself to get to the place where he would obey God. Just as he does with us, God used Jonah's enemies to save Jonah from himself. Jonah needed to see how hard-hearted he had become and he needed God to rescue him from that hard-heartedness. In the New Testament Jesus equates the "sign" of Jonah<sup>22</sup> with repentance and he immediately moves to the story of the Good Samaritan, an outsider who loved, cared for and welcomed his enemies. Those who repent of hard-heartedness and self-righteousness and throw themselves on God's mercy are those who are saved. If we prefer to harden our hearts and judge our enemies, then our hatred, our refusal to welcome and forgive, and our failure to be God's ambassadors condemn us and reveal our unbelief.

When we come face to face with enemies or those who have sinned against us, we see how much we operate out of our own selfishness and flesh. For this reason, God regularly allows enemies and strangers to cross our paths so that we must grapple with our hatred, self-righteousness and judgment. It is way too easy to love those who are like us, those in our churches and fellowship groups who unwittingly reinforce our claims of self-righteousness and rarely challenge our assumptions. God puts outsiders in our lives so that our faith would grow, and we might know the love that rescued us when we too were outsiders, strangers, and enemies. Like Jonah, we are disobedient. We don't just lack the patience and longsuffering needed to love well; we are also much more interested in a risk-averse, conflict-free, and well-resourced daily life. If this is our attitude, God may try to get our attention by putting circumstances, people, and conflict in our path that disrupt the false peace we pursue. In Jonah's case, God sent sailors, a storm and huge beast into Jonah's path, all to deliver him—and those he was called to serve as an Ambassador, the Ninevites. Through this testing, Jonah came to terms with the true character of God.

Jonah had to be eaten up by his hatred of God's kingdom and die to himself before he could be used by God. We find ourselves in similar situations when the gospel's power in our lives is overwhelmed by a fear of circumstances. We become much more concerned about how we measure up or how we can hold onto what we have or what we might earn; our interest in how the gospel can impact the lives of others fades. Just like Jonah, we need to repent of our foolishness and become swallowed up completely by Christ's work. He is the One who gives us significance, upholds our reputation, and reveals our worth. Jesus' finished work is what frees us from seeking pleasure outside the gospel. Instead of competing with others, feeling discouraged when we don't stack up and judgmental when we do, relying on the gospel gives us what we need to promote the accomplishments of others, be encouraged when they thrive, and mentor them quietly in their failure. This is all because our security lies elsewhere.

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<sup>22</sup> Luke 11

Our grasp of the righteousness of Jesus has another effect on us as ambassadors. If we are secure in our relationship with Jesus, we are free to spend time with believers and unbelievers. We might be winsome and godly people at work, in the neighborhood, or school, but if those who don't know Christ can't observe us up close and in friendship ask us questions about our hope in Christ, they'll never benefit from our physical proximity. If we spend all our time with believers, we can become judgmental, critical and legalistic—attitudes that few find appealing. I might have an essential message (as we'll see in the next lesson) but no one is around to observe me as God's representative. In most situations it will probably take up to five years of solid friendship before we can have frank conversations about the gospel with a co-worker or neighbor. So we need to look to establish deep and meaningful relationships with friends and neighbors. If we have no unbelievers in our lives, either our faith or our priorities needs to be remedied.

The opposite can be true as well. If we give ourselves completely to relationships outside the church, we can become so enmeshed with unbelievers that our lives and witness lose their saltiness. We begin to take on the values and mindset of the world. Without the support and "sharpening" of believing friends, we become adept at meeting surface needs and reflecting the expectations of those we're around. We may be tempted to cut corners in our work, or sin in other ways. To grow spiritually, we need authentic relationships of mutual give and take with believers *and* unbelievers.

Jesus' welcome is radically different from ours. His love is as an Ambassador who embodies the love of the Father. If we have received the gospel by faith, we are able to welcome and love like Jesus. Confident in his Father's love for him, Jesus fearlessly greets his enemies with a warm embrace, welcomes and spars with those who would actively deny, betray, trick and entrap him. He calls those he loves by name, is glad to spend time with them and engage them, not when they stray, but because they stray. Loving others in their sin is not just completely unreasonable but also entirely absurd *unless* we are motivated by the love that loved us first and saved us in the midst of our active rebellion and hatred.

The power of the gospel is displayed when we welcome others in the midst of their lostness outside of Christ. The power of ambassadorship comes from knowing that sin and rebellion are powerless against God's deep love for his Son. "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). What gives believers the power to overcome the natural inclination to care only for those who are like us, so that we can love outsiders and truly be ambassadors? Only the gospel can transform us to boldly offer welcome and peace to neighbor, foreigner, stranger, alien and outsider and to love with courage. We know the provision, peace and welcome of the One we represent.

It is always easier to build a wall than a bridge. Often in our conversation we can unknowingly build walls by what we say and how we respond to others. But we should not be surprised by the sins of others. Sin is always a byproduct of a heart in need of change. Our call is to be available to God and our friends. It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict and transform hearts. Our main job as Ambassadors is to show up—to be in relationships with others where God is already at work; to witness what he is doing in the heart of another. So don't worry about your reputation. Jesus was called a friend of sinners too; just don't put yourself in situations where you will be tempted. Find a partner

to hold you accountable if need be. Christ has given us his record so that in faith we are becoming the righteousness of God. He has gone before us, interceding and providing for us, so that we can be Ambassadors who make the most of every opportunity given to us.

Are there people with whom you have ongoing conflict, competition or judgment in your workplace, neighborhood or school? God is calling you to love those people. Clearly your own efforts have been ineffectual. What is in the way that needs to be removed? How do you need to apply the gospel differently to your own heart and life so that you can move from conflict, competition and judgment to compassion, mercy and grace?

## HOME EXERCISE PEOPLE OF PEACE AND HOSPITALITY

Make a list of the people who hold a grudge against you or have ongoing conflict with you in your workplace, neighborhood or school. Try to describe the grudge from their point of view.

Now, make a second list of people you have been holding a grudge against with envy, judgment, coldness etc. because of comparisons (of superiority or criticism) you have made about that other person. Are there any observations you have about the two lists? List what you need to receive from Christ to let go of your sinful reactions and reach out to the other person.

How in faith can you become more of a person of peace and hospitality? As you repent of things on your second list, consider pursuing one or two of the people on that list with kindness, reconciliation and relationship. Think about the gifts and interests you might have in common. Could you work on a project together or collaborate on a common need? *(Please know that there are also some relationships that need to be mended by someone else, because of the depth of pain and hurt that exists. That's ok. God is capable of calling someone else into that relationship if he desires to see change in those cases. Every human need is not a call from God!)*

## LESSON 9

### MESSENGERS: GOD EQUIPS US WITH THE GOSPEL

#### BIG IDEA

Sharing our faith does not have to be offensive to be effective. No one wants to be *that* guy! When we interact with others about the impact of the good news on our lives, we need to realize that, just like us, other people want to be loved authentically, listened to and respected for their point of view. We can do that! As we saw in previous lessons, God has placed us where we are to live as his ImageBearers, Imitators, BondServants, Stewards and Ambassadors. As we interact with others in these roles, the Spirit does the work of transformation; we just need to be a faithful presence that points to his work and tells our story when others ask about the reason for the hope we have.

God has entrusted us with our relationships with those around us. He has enlisted us in a great cooperative mission to share the gospel with and make disciples of our children, friends, neighbors and co-workers. In the past he used others to free us from our idolatries and rebellion and to disciple us in the faith. Now he invites us to do the same in partnership with his Spirit. So, rather than being consumed with our personal agendas, the gospel changes our perspective to see that our lives are full of opportunities to engage those who do not know Christ with the seeds of the gospel.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

- Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passages(s)
- Article: *A New Outlook on the Neighborhood*
- Discussion: Process *A New Outlook on the Neighborhood* article
- Exercise: *A Lifestyle of Sowing*
- Wrap Up: Final thoughts and prayer

#### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Sometimes we get boxed into preparation mode where we see ourselves as novices (as a student, starting out in a new job, etc.) and as a result feel as if we have little to offer those with greater experience. The Bible sees such circumstances very differently. Paul says the following to Timothy, but it can be applied to anyone who is lower on the institutional totem pole: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young."<sup>23</sup> Our youth and inexperience might change the manner and approach we use, but we need to remember the value of the calling that God has entrusted to us. In Romans 15 Paul says that he is speaking boldly because of the grace given to him. Because of the grace given to us, we can also forget ourselves and speak boldly about the freedom and power for change found in the gospel.

Which is a more powerful way to reach those around us: working through a cold, formulaic presentation of truth while appearing to have it all together, or allowing people to see our honest struggles in disappointing circumstances and our efforts to apply the gospel to that situation? How about the opposite end of the spectrum? What happens

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Timothy 4:12

when there is a victory for the work team, a promotion, or a neighborhood event that should lead to joy, and instead you are hollow and empty because of your personal idolatry or brokenness? Do you hide these emotions and thoughts or do you use those struggles to let others see God working in your life? God can use everything in our lives to open doors for deeper conversations if we allow him. We should be people who sow the seeds of the gospel wherever we go. God will show us what soil is fertile and where to go deeper. He is the One who hardens and softens, nurtures and sends sun and rain to allow growth. We work in concert with him and allow him to do his work as we serve as his partners. Best of all, we witness what he is doing and participate with joy when those who were once lost are found.

## SETUP

What does God ask of us as messengers of the gospel? First, we are to be a faithful presence that loves and serves. As we've seen in previous lessons that focused on the Creation Aspects (ImageBearers and Imitators) and Providential Aspects (BondServants and Stewards) of our calling to follow Jesus in our work, who we are and what we do are critical components of our message. These aspects are also a critical foundation to being a mouthpiece for the message of the gospel to those around us. One way we do this is by being candid with everyone about what God is doing in us and how we see him at work in the world. We do this by welcoming personal conversation and questions on our perspective. While many people we interact with may not go to church (and in fact may never do so), they can come to listen to us and have deeper spiritual conversations with us. When they see our openness to what God is doing in the circumstances of our lives, they will grow to trust us professionally, relationally and spiritually if God is working in their hearts and minds.

In our Bible Conversation and Article, we'll look at how spiritual conversations can naturally flow from what we do every day, based on the ups and downs of life in community with believers and unbelievers.

READ: 1 Peter 3:13-18

**LEADER'S NOTE:** If our behavior is in alignment with our message, our integrity will eventually be one of the things that attracts the interests of others. If we present the gospel in a gentle and gracious manner, we prevent being a stumbling block to others. The power of the gospel lies not in our persuasion but in the reality of the

ASK: How does Peter link the "reason for the hope that is in you" to the way the gospel changes us?

ASK: What are the attitudes and actions Peter proposes we should have as we "give a reason for the hope that we have"? Think about who initiates the conversation here.

**LEADERS NOTE:** In the model Peter presents here, our actions will help initiate conversation. Especially in the workplace, the inquirer should be attracted to the fact that we carry ourselves differently and have a totally different perspective from those around us. Hopefully we stand out in how we are at odds with the ways of the world in its hopefulness, gentleness and respect.

ASK: Why is this hard to accept being slandered and treated unfairly "for the reason we give"? Why does Peter say, "Have no fear of them"?

LEADER'S NOTE: Being demeaned or rejected by others is difficult to experience, especially if we believe that our standing in man's eyes is more important than glorifying God. We may make wisdom mistakes in how and when we communicate the gospel, but ultimately it is the gospel that people will accept or reject if we are getting out of the way and letting God speak through us for the hope that we have. If we present our hope in Christ, others can inquire more deeply and respond to what God is doing in their lives. We don't have to push them to become converts.

ASK: Why is it "better . . . to suffer for doing good than for doing evil"?

LEADER'S NOTE: These three questions revolve around the idea that God sees and knows our circumstances. We are to let him judge those who treat us with evil intent and trust that he oversees all of life. Just as Jesus suffered evil and took the sins of his enemies upon himself, we trust that he can do the same thing with our enemies, so that we can return good for evil.

The next passage shows how sharing our faith is a process of sowing, watering, growing and harvesting the gospel, empowered by God. As messengers of the gospel God calls us to work in parallel to the work of his Spirit in the lives of those around us. Because of this we always need to be ready to share how the good news is good for us each day.

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:6-11

LEADERS NOTE: The main thrust of this passage is that every part of our work and even the results that flow from our work are all from God. The purpose in all we do should be to bring glory to God. If we remember that it is God who gives us opportunities to share our faith and he is responsible for whether those conversations go deeper, we are freed up to be faithful to the opportunities he gives us, whatever they may be.

ASK: What does Paul mean by "he who plants and he who waters are one"?

ASK: How does God give the growth in verses 6 and 7?

ASK: How is the foundation of our work always Jesus?  
How is this especially true of sharing the message of hope we have?

TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: Evangelism has gotten a bad rap, in part because of it has often been carelessly and insensitively done. Part of the problem is a one-size-fits-all

approach to witnessing that is awkward for everybody; you and everyone else want to avoid it for good reason. Evangelism didn't always have this problem and this reputation. Before mass market approaches were applied to everything, including religion, we looked at evangelism and discipleship individually and relationally. If you end up treating people like projects or trophies they will see through your efforts to either reject you or call you to love more authentically.

How can we learn from the past and move towards a different future in the way we communicate as Messengers of the gospel? We need to think of ways to welcome others authentically, to relate to people uniquely, and to creatively explain God's big story. Hopefully, *A New Outlook on the Neighborhood* can help you move beyond fear and shame to find joy and freedom in relating to unbelievers. It's possible, if we allow God to help us embody the welcome and peace that flow from the gospel.

#### ARTICLE

Turn to the article *A New Outlook on the Neighborhood* in the Participant's Guide and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

#### DISCUSSION

ASK: What failures have you experienced—on the receiving end or giving end—in past attempts to share your faith?

ASK: Why might an approach that emphasizes, "Except for the hope of the gospel, we are not much different from those without Christ," be effective?

ASK: Can you tell a personal story about your relationship with Jesus and the value of that relationship today?

ASK: Is there someone God is asking you to pursue relationally out of sheer love of neighbor this week?

HOME EXERCISE: We are thinking about how to effectively relate to friends and neighbors. Use the exercise *A LifeStyle of Sowing* to consider your relationships and how you might sow, water or harvest in partnership with God's work.

TURN TO: your copy of *A Lifestyle of Sowing*.

WRAP UP: Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

# A NEW OUTLOOK ON THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Look around your neighborhood. Take stock of the relationships you can see from your front door. Step into the hall or aisle at work, the grocery store, your apartment or dorm. Whom do you know? How do you know them? How can you get to know them better? In your mind's eye, look around and take it all in. Give thanks for this place you've been given as a Steward, including the pleasures, the pains, the friends and even those who call you their enemy. Jesus has sent you as a Messenger of the gospel into every square inch of your "neighborhood" so that he can give sight to the blind and freedom to captives and lift judgment for the condemned. Does that feel like good news to you? Does it bring you joy or do you feel guilt for not doing more? These relationships and places are good gifts entrusted to you by God. Revel in them! When we lose ourselves in thanks for God's purposes, we can find a deep contentedness that comes from his Spirit. Getting lost in the rapturous grand cause of God, we finally forget ourselves and truly live.

We communicate how much we enjoy those around us in the way we welcome them. Our words, nonverbal cues, and tone tell others clearly and quickly whether they are valued or merely tolerated. God's love is a welcoming love; it embraces the outsider, forgives the rebel, and is long-suffering and merciful to the prodigal. God's love is the kind of love we should want to emulate and communicate. We emulate it because we know it personally, and we communicate it when it overflows from our lives. Our thoughts, actions, and words will always reflect where we place our hope and how God has impacted or failed to impact us. What consumes your conversation and your thoughts? Is it God's provision, or your anger and disappointment with circumstances? When we welcome others, do we treat them as befits their eternal nature—with the dignity, care and grace that is fitting for someone made in the image of God? Treating people with honor and respect—the way we would want to be treated ourselves—is an intensely biblical practice based on our own knowledge of being created in the image of God. That should get noticed in a world bent on proving itself and getting all it can! It should encourage us that, even in our failures, God has us right where he wants us. If we are serving him there, he is interceding for us (John 17:15).

A life where repentance is normal and genuine allows us to be authentic with believer and unbeliever alike. If we can admit that we're not perfect and demonstrate that we're approachable and non-defensive because God is helping us in our struggles, the gospel becomes so much more accessible to those who don't know him. Isn't the essence of the good news that there is hope for sinners like us?

It's no accident that God has placed you near your neighbors, friends, and co-workers. Their proximity alone is a great relationship builder. When my family moved to our current neighborhood, we purposely purchased a home on a corner lot with a detached garage. We wanted more sidewalk so we could meet and greet neighbors. We tore down the privacy fence and built a deck close to the street. We put a workshop in the detached garage, where people can easily see us working on projects which become conversation starters. Modern life is often described as crowded loneliness, where we move from dehumanizing work environments to cocooned home environments. We wanted to offer something different.

You might have an attached garage or live in an apartment building—that's not the point here. But how can you create points of personal connection in your day and week with the resources God has entrusted to you?

We need to think about how and when we present the gospel, especially in today's workplace, which (rightly) frowns on proselytizing "on the clock." We need to remember that we are not called to bring people to Jesus so much as we are to bring Jesus to people through authentic living and an attitude built on the righteousness of Christ rather than our own. We're told to be ready to give a word when asked to do so.<sup>24</sup> If we are in relationship and doing life differently compared to those around us, people will ask! Saint Francis said, "Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words." It isn't merely our words that have power; it is the gospel at work under our words that makes them powerful and effective when we have the opportunity to use them.

You may have pretty good reasons for hesitating about using words. Many of us have stumbled through or listened to poor gospel presentations—impersonal, careless, self-righteous, even dehumanizing, sometimes burden-inducing rather than burden-lifting. It doesn't have to be that way. What St. Francis said is very true. Your life does matter more than your words. Your life is a reflection of Christ's life and a true signpost for the gospel. When people are welcomed and they compare how you treat them to the way those without faith do, they will see with their hearts the difference Jesus has made in your life. They will want it for themselves and say, "Tell me more!" True, our actions may not always be interpreted correctly. People might say, "Wow, you really are a fantastic guy" and you might need to respond, "Well, actually, I really am not. I just have a very merciful Savior." At those points, when the Spirit is at work, we need to be purposeful and direct with our words. We need to be clear and use simple language and stories that others understand.

I grew up reading many books on apologetics, but after sharing the gospel with others over the last twenty years, I think the world has moved past apologetics. The reality is that very few people come to faith through rational argument alone. Yes, they've had questions that demanded answers, but the reality is that people come to faith because of what God does in their hearts, not just their heads. Much of the current generation is skeptical of organized religion and antagonistic towards God. For them, reason alone is not enough. Not only does truth need to be reasonable, it also needs to pass the 'smell' test, where people see if your way of life matches up to their life experience. This is where the lives we live make a critical difference. Because of the skepticism and fear present today, spiritual decisions are not made quickly but over significant amounts of time, in relationship. Face to face relationship is both critical and tricky because the current generation is hungry for relationship and because of technology, unequipped to engage in authentic living at the same time.

So first, we need to understand our own journey and free ourselves of religious jargon. Good friends over the past ten years have helped me get rid of "insider" language to explain how I relate to God (sharing your faith, Giving my testimony, got saved, sanctification, justification, etc.) If you're anything like me, you've probably spent a lot of time in a Christian ghetto, and it might take a lot of work to relate to people outside your regular circles. Practice outlining and telling your story in a new way. Are you authentic?

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Peter 3:14-18

Is life all roses? How well does your story match your current life circumstance? How is God freeing you from idolatry and a bent towards serving yourself? How is the good news good for *you* today? Can you communicate with others without using a lot of theological terms that are only understood in a churched subculture?

Second, show up and ask good questions. If you want to care for people, you need to show up. You don't wait for an invite, you go and build relationships. Invite others into your world so they see how your faith is a real alternative to the crazy ways the world lives. When people recognize that you care for them personally and want to go deeper relationally, without judgment or pretense, they will respond positively. If they sense they are your project, they won't stick around long. Visit people when a family member is ill, bring them a meal, pick up their kids from school and drive them home. Love others in simple and practical ways, and build relationship that is truly concerned about the lives of others.

Third, be creative in getting to know unbelievers. Hobbies, shared projects, community initiatives, meals, celebrations, even shared vacations are ways to get to know and spend time with others. I am a big fan of multi-tasking—getting to know someone doesn't need to take a lot of extra time. When you are performing tasks, going to meals or getting a job done, do it with someone else. Ask them their perspective on subjects and listen. Let them at some point *ask* you for yours. Instead of doing the church-based youth program with your son or daughter, join one at the YMCA or YWCA, Boy and Girl Scouts, etc. Throw your lot in with unbelievers, model evangelism for your kids, and be a witness to what God wants to do (and is doing) in your neighborhood.

Some of the best conversations I've had with unbelievers occurred when I wasn't looking for them, when others asked me for my take on the meaning, purpose and direction of life. Shared life circumstances are great for interacting about age and stage issues as well. Have neighbors over. Throw a party for your child's class. Never go to lunch alone. Carpool. Share a hotel room with a coworker on a business trip. Affirm someone in your community for their hard but necessary work.

Finally, pray that God would show you what he is doing, how he is going before you and spiritually pacing all your relationships. Pray that he would show you the right time to sow, plant, water, wait and harvest. He has placed you where you are to let the message of the gospel impact your relationships with believers and unbelievers –and he is overseeing all of those relationships for your good and his glory.

## EXERCISE

### A LIFESTYLE OF SOWING

The article suggested thinking about the people you can see from your doorstep or threshold in a typical day or week. Make a list of them here. Next, ask God to bring to mind ways you can be more purposeful in connecting with those people. Write those down. Ask God to show you how he wants you to sow, water or harvest in your words and actions.

Let's work through a couple of examples.

| <u>Name</u>            | <u>Sow, Water, Harvest</u> | <u>Content of Conversation</u>          |
|------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| (1) Jeanine, Co-worker | Sow                        | Go to lunch for birthday celebration    |
| (2) Joe, Neighbor      | Water                      | Follow up on conversation about parents |
| (3) Sal, Store Clerk   | Water                      | Ask about movie with spiritual themes   |
| (4) Joan, Divorcee     | Harvest                    | Inquire about last week's sadness       |

Try more of the same in the space below.

|     | <u>Name</u> | <u>Sow, Water, Harvest</u> | <u>Content of Conversation</u> |
|-----|-------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (1) |             |                            |                                |
| (2) |             |                            |                                |
| (3) |             |                            |                                |
| (4) |             |                            |                                |
| (5) |             |                            |                                |
| (6) |             |                            |                                |
| (7) |             |                            |                                |

## LESSON 10

### SABBATH REST: REPENTING OF WORK AND LEISURE

Whether you're a wired business person, overscheduled parent, virtual student or part-timer working for multiple employers, you have certainly experienced how, in a hyper-connected culture, work has a tendency to creep in and become the overwhelming focus of our lives. As a result, we have to be intentional about protecting time set aside for Sabbath rest to reflect on our relationship with God and gather together as his people. In Sabbath rest we engage God in ways that help us examine life and reorient all of our time as God's and not our own. Just as there is no sacred-secular divide in our work, there shouldn't be a divide in our non-working hours either. In everything we do, we strive to please God. Sabbath rest helps us put things in proper perspective to do just that.

Work and leisure are both good gifts from God, but they can also become idols that pull us from him. In this lesson, we'll look at how pursuing the Sabbath in light of the gospel is a practice that purifies and transforms all other elements in our lives. A gospel-centered pursuit of Sabbath rest essentially brings work and leisure back under the authority of God. If we aren't regularly setting aside time for God and his people, our free time can be eaten up in purposeless entertainment and recreation. These can end up as nothing more than an exhausting diversion or time where we amuse ourselves in self-indulgence. The gospel turns us from the idolatrous uses of work and leisure to embrace Sabbath rest in ways that those who haven't experienced the love of Christ cannot.

#### LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passage(s)

Article: ***Longing for Rest***

Discussion: Process ***Longing for Rest*** article

Exercise: ***From the Son's Day to Monday***

Wrap Up: Final thoughts and prayer

#### BIBLE CONVERSATION

There are two main ways we fail to embrace Sabbath rest.

First, we allow everyday preoccupations with work and leisure to crowd out our relationship with God and times of celebration with his people. The commitments of everyday life can subtly dislodge our lives from gospel meaning. Regulating practices like Sabbath rest and living by repentance and faith give us discernment to disarm their claims of fulfillment, and give the Spirit room to fill and re-center the places they inhabited. Those with unexamined, boundary-less lives can find themselves toiling towards a set of goals that other forces dictate for them. Or, if we are able to stop our activity, the overwhelming pressures of school, home, or workplace can drive us emotionally towards fear and spiritual distraction.

**LEADER'S NOTE:** In verse 11 we see that the commandment to rest parallels God's rest on the seventh day, when he reflected on creation and saw that it was good and complete. As creatures made in his image, this is a pattern for us to follow in which we think about God's creation, providence, and redemption, and give him glory for our relationship with him as his people. We see in verse 10 that the benefits of this rest are intended for everyone in the household and even the broader creation (livestock and sojourners) for renewal and restoration.

Second, just as we can divorce spirituality from our work week, we can see weekends and holidays merely as times for hobbies, sports and entertainment. We can be consumed with play, working towards a rest that always feels just out of reach, instead of enjoying each day in the presence and worship of God. In our society, leisure is defined negatively as time spent away from work. Divorced from God, it is a counterfeit rest. In the workplace, the weekend is synonymous with "on your own time" in a way that implies that you are owned and controlled by others the rest of the time. And because technology does allow us to be continually connected, many never truly "vacate" their callings, even to pursue leisure. We schedule vacations and travel so tightly that many return to work exhausted, ready to pursue the rest and refreshment of a predictable schedule. For most of us, our time is all mixed in and all mixed up.

#### SETUP

Leisure, like work, is not a bad thing, but unmoored from faith, it can fill us with busyness. Our lives may need diversion from work, but even more so, they need regular reflection and re-ordering, things leisure alone can never produce. Leisure apart from God and his people might be a diversion from work, but it cannot provide any sort of regulating or spiritually valuable effect. We don't need a work or leisure ethic as much as we need a Sabbath rest ethic.

A gospel-centered approach to Sabbath rest reorders and redefines both work and leisure. It is built upon the coming reality of Jesus' future Sabbath rest, when humans and creation will be made anew to live a life with God in his reordered kingdom. The gospel helps us approach Sabbath rest in ways not possible in the pursuit of work or leisure alone. As we are reminded of who God is and who he has made us to be, we can embrace his purposes and plans in all we do, rather than pursue personal schemes and selfish idolatries.

The first two passages we'll consider reveal what a huge gift God gave a fallen humanity by establishing the practice of a one-in-seven-day Sabbath. We'll look at the establishment of the Sabbath in Exodus and Deuteronomy and mark the similarities and differences in each passage. In Exodus 20 God models Sabbath rest for us. He shows that just as we have a God who works, we also have a God who rests in enjoyment and contemplation of his work.

**READ:** Exodus 20:8-11 (Sabbath established in relation to Creation)

**ASK:** How does Exodus 20:8-11 ground the Sabbath in creation and in God himself?

**ASK:** When we imitate God in a pattern of rest, how do we realize we are not God?

**ASK:** Does God need rest? Do we? How does God take the lead to initiate our rest?

Now let's look at a parallel passage in Deuteronomy that highlights the Sabbath from a different perspective—that of benefit to and love of neighbor.

READ: Deuteronomy 5:12-15 (Sabbath established in relation to neighbor.)

**LEADER'S NOTE:** Here we see the Sabbath as the key to freedom from slavery in all its forms. Sabbath rest helps free the people of God and the broader society from the tyranny of work; it provides time for everyone to consider the mighty deeds of God's creation, providence and redemption. The effects of a Sabbath rest spill over to those who do not know God. (We see this in verse 14, which references the sojourner in Israel.)

ASK: How does Deuteronomy 5:12-15 ground the Sabbath in relation to neighbor?

ASK: Why is deliverance from the slavery of work so important to Moses' audience? (Remember God's faithfulness to Israel at this time.)

ASK: How does a failure to rest place us under a defining yoke of slavery?

ASK: How does a failure to rest minimize God's work of deliverance?

Finally, let's look at some ways Israel and we in the church get the Sabbath all mixed up.

READ: Isaiah 58: 1-14

**LEADER'S NOTE:** In this passage we see some of the purposes that underlie fasting and Sabbath-keeping. Our fasting and Sabbath-keeping are to be oriented towards worship and justice, towards freeing us from idols that fuel our appetites and passions. This brings about renewal, through repentance from those idols and greater faith in Jesus. In this passage we also see that such renewal allows us to better understand our calling to love God and neighbor, a major theme of this study. Though God's people prosper in the circumstances that the Sabbath brings about, their leisure and prosperity are not the underlying reasons for the Sabbath.

ASK: Isaiah highlights two practices in Israel that were supposed foundational to the reform of the nation. What are they and how are they linked?

ASK: What were some of the effects that fasting and Sabbath-keeping were to have on society and everyday life?

ASK: From the passage, list some practical ways that fasting (rather than being captive to our appetites) might help reform other activities we engage in during the week?

ASK: From the passage, see if you can list ways that the worship of God (Sabbath-keeping) helps us see the ways we need to repent.

ASK: Is there evidence in the passage that Isaiah is asking Israel to repent of both work and leisure on the Sabbath?

TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: We are now going to think more about the ways the everyday practices of Sabbath, work and leisure interact with each other by reading and discussing ***Longing for Rest***.

#### ARTICLE

Turn to the article ***Longing for Rest*** in the Participant's Guide and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

#### DISCUSSION

ASK: What do you think about the concept of an eighth day—the Son's-day—as being different from the Old Testament concept of Sabbath?

ASK: How does the article characterize the Son's day as being different from Sabbath?

ASK: What are some ways you pursue work or household chores on the Sabbath?  
What is appealing to you in that pursuit?  
How do you think about that pursuit in light of the idea of Son's-day?

ASK: What are some ways you pursue leisure and entertainment on the Sabbath?  
What is appealing to you in that pursuit?  
How can we think about that pursuit in light of the concept of Son's-day?

## ARTICLE

### LONGING FOR REST

Every day, as participants in the marketplace, schools, neighborhoods and culture at large, we encounter institutional forces attempting to influence us, even as we try to impact them with the gospel. If we live an unexamined life, these forces may find us vulnerable targets. However, if we observe the Sabbath by reflecting on our work and the culture in which God has placed us, we can resist and even reshape structures that are not aligned with God's purposes. God will give us the strength and insight to shape our work cultures when we ask him to purify us, use us, and lead us to the repentance and faith that flow from the gospel.

The Sabbath is not just a day where we do or don't do things. Jesus said that God made the Sabbath for us as a gift—a space and place where something happens to us, and in us, where we are made holy through God's presence. In the Ten Commandments, we see that God initiated the Sabbath so that his people could rest and reset their lives as they spent time in deep connection to him and to their neighbors. Going further back, it could be claimed that part of the original sin was not just rebellion against God, but also a failure to trust and delight in relationship with God—the heart of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is foundational to other practices we engage in as believers. It nourishes and sustains us in all the roles we've focused on in Gospel-Centered Work (ImageBearers, Imitators, BondServants, Stewards, Ambassadors and Messengers). Sabbath is a time and place in which we rest and commune with the God who gives freedom from all other forces that want to shape us into their image. True life emanates from the Sabbath—when we embrace it as the Son's day—as the space where God's people come face to face with the person of Jesus, to be challenged to live in joy and faith week after week until he comes again.

In the space of Sabbath rest we are reminded to ask ourselves:

*Do I know deep down that I am made in the image and likeness of God?  
Do I desire to imitate him in my actions and character?  
Am I serving him as a beloved and redeemed member of his household?  
Do I desire to serve others selflessly as Jesus did?  
Do I go with God's authority?  
Does my life reflect and speak of Jesus' welcome and peace?  
Do I trust my Savior enough to rest in and celebrate his presence?*

Sabbath as the Son's day is something completely different from work and leisure. In work we are tempted to be remade in the image of commerce rather than transform the marketplace. Leisure can also become a selfish activity, often engaged in as a form of competition and independence from God. Pursuing Sabbath rest in the freedom that the gospel provides helps us to become both God- and other-centered. Seen in light of the gospel and pursued regularly as a way to connect to God and neighbor, Sabbath rest helps reform and recast all other activities in our leisure and in our work.

One reason why the Sabbath is important is that it is an integration of belief and action, of faith and repentance, of what we do and why we do it. It is a critical outworking of the gospel in our lives. As it marks our days, the Sabbath helps us look back in repentance and

look forward in faith. Before the institution of the Sabbath, Israel was not a people; they were lost without a knowledge of God. With their deliverance from slavery in Egypt came the commandment to keep the Sabbath. When they came to know the character of their Deliverer, they found that he was a God who rested from work—not because he had to, but because he chose to. As his ImageBearers, it was part of their design to rest as well—a gift given for their benefit. Resting for them was deeply tied to their deliverance from slavery. Because they knew God, no longer were they to be slaves to any dehumanizing system or exploitation by men. They would not be slaves to a culture, an employer, or even the expectations of themselves or others, because of the deep love that their Creator had for them.

In light of God's deliverance, Sabbath rest became a celebration of the freedom found in God's love for his people, his adopted children. God was now not just the Creator and source of their provision; he was also their Redeemer who one day would pay the penalty for their sin to deliver them completely. Just as it did for the Israelites, a life rhythm that welcomes Sabbath rest puts us in a position to hear from God and receive his grace in the gospel, so that we can be strengthened with joy as we face the week before us. The Sabbath is a springboard that helps our faith into action, where we reflect and rely on what we believe, and reinforce what we know to be true as we look to the future. Our shared routines of worship on the Sabbath shape our identity and transform our desires in community with God's people. The gospel reorients how we perceive the world and come to love the things that God loves in accordance with his Word.

You see, we really don't have to work to keep the Sabbath. Instead, we need to let the Sabbath keep *us*. We aren't keeping the Sabbath to prove that we are God's people or that we are saved. We celebrate the Sabbath *because* we are God's beloved children. We celebrate being in his presence, so that we are reminded of our participation in his work to reclaim the cosmos. Our Sabbath rest is based on the justifying power and righteousness of Jesus. His completed work is our truest place of rest as believers. The Sabbath is a celebration of the security of our relationship with God, God's future final victory over sin and death, and an anticipation of his return. When we give ourselves to his Sabbath, we experience God's presence as intense rest. Our need for work and leisure are diminished as we see the ways those things dominate our attention at God's expense. Burdens are lifted and idols dethroned when we let the Spirit displace other things that have tried to rule us.

Just before Jesus' incarnation, there was a collective longing among Jewish writers for the arrival of an "eighth day," an eighth day that would end the cycle of toil and labor among God's people because it would mark the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Because Jesus has come, the seventh day of rest, the Jewish Sabbath day, now lies in our past. That Sabbath day was observed in a context of toil and labor while we waited for our Savior. Since Jesus has risen, conquering sin and death and delivering his people, his sons and daughters now celebrate his Sabbath rest differently.

Instead of living with rest and hope on only one of seven days, God's people now live in a new day—the day of the Son—an eighth day that began a new era. The risen Christ appeared on this new first day, so we worship in joy on Sunday rather than merely resting from toil on Saturday. We live in the new age of Jubilee, where there are no sacred or profane days; each day holds forth a potential for a reclaimed life lived with and for God. For three centuries following the first Pentecost, Sunday was the first day of the week,

where believers gathered in contrast to the Saturday Sabbath observed by the rest of Judaism. The first day of the week reflected the new reality that God's people were in the world, not only to rest and escape from work and the pressures of daily life, but also for the sake of daily living. This new first day helped embrace, reform and recast the coming week in light of the gospel in a way that the Sabbath of old did not. The Son's day took on even larger meaning as the first day of the week— Christ was now Lord of all of life. The reality is that a world and time are coming when there will be no more toil. As believers on mission, we have a celebratory foretaste of that great day when Christ will come again to reclaim all of creation.

The institutions where we pursue work and leisure may tell us that God is not welcome on Mondays; that faith needs to be left at the doorstep; that, like them, we should live as if there were no God and, if not that, that he is most certainly irrelevant to life. But the reality of Sabbath on the Son's day has us confessing the power and relevance of the gospel! God is reclaiming the heavens and the earth, and instead of everything in the world needing to be devoid of God, the exact opposite is true. The whole world shouts and sings the truth of the gospel. The rocks cry out and point to the presence, character, and revelation of God. All creation points to our need for Christ's intervention in history, as well as the hope of one day being united to him in the new heavens and earth. Ever since that first new day of Pentecost, that first gospel Sabbath, the Holy Spirit has rested upon his people and their work to extend Sabbath rest with anticipation of renewal and hope in the coming kingdom.

God is renewing all things, starting with you and me and the work of our hands. Let's rejoice that he has chosen us to be his partners in this great work!

## EXERCISE FROM THE SON'S DAY TO MONDAY

**Sabbath is a pattern of relational renewal  
that empowers seasons of God-given work.**

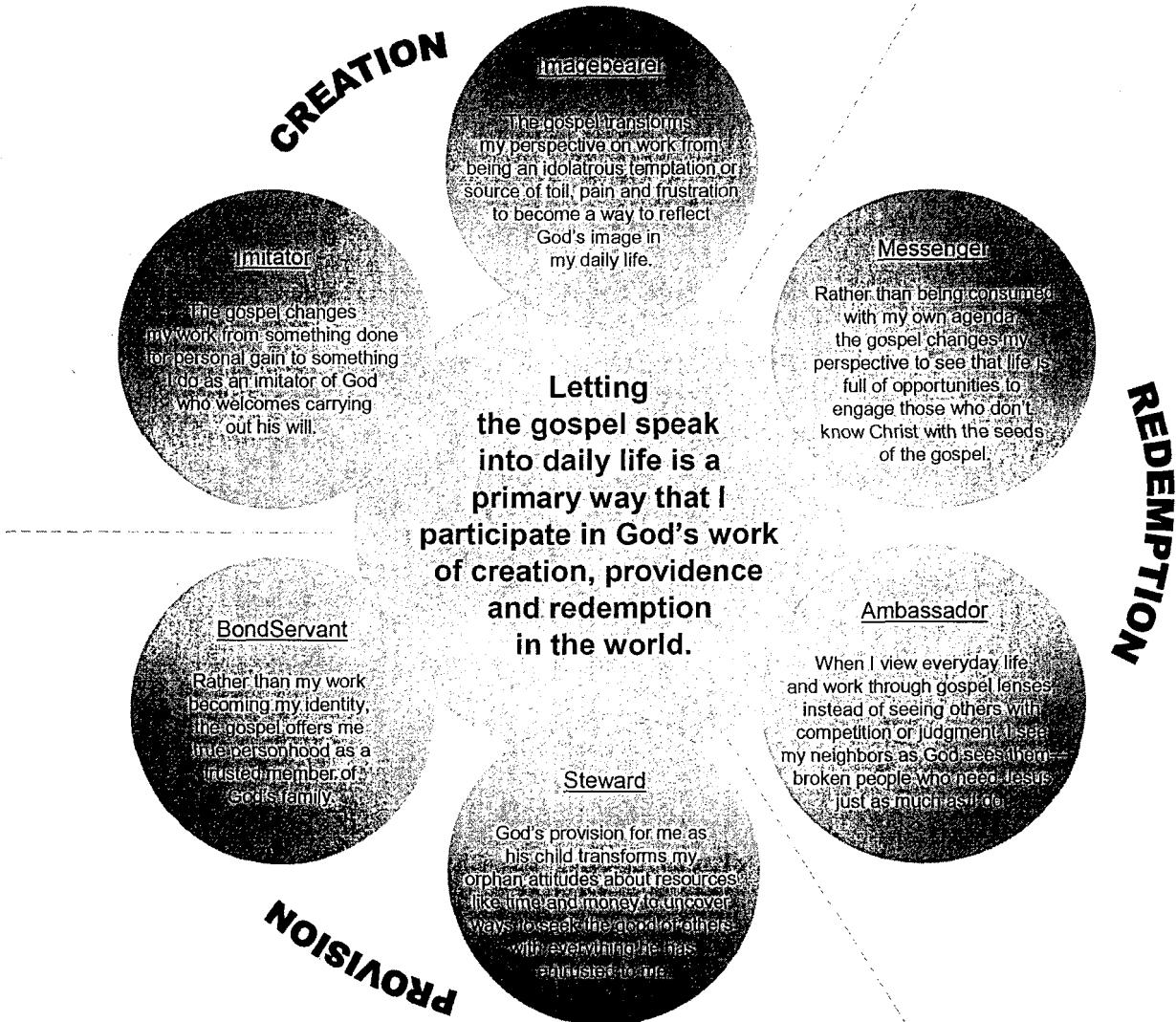
ASK: Reflect on practices you've adopted to celebrate the Sabbath. What are some memories of how God has renewed you through the Sabbath?

**Sabbath encourages our enjoyment of God,  
others, and God's creation.**

ASK: What do you do to celebrate God, people and creation? Can you remember when a Sabbath practice changed someone else for their good?

**Sabbath is a mindset of  
celebration and unity with God and his people.**

ASK: How do you celebrate Sabbath as an act of unity with God and his people? Can you remember a time in your life when you felt a particularly strong kinship and affinity with God's people? How did it come about?



## APPENDIX B: Significant Qualitative Research Responses

- Material is too ‘theological’ and dense.
- Material does not contain enough narrative and although well-constructed does not grab reader.
- Articles are too long.
- Concepts are too abstract. Try to first educate on a theological framework and give application oriented narrative.
- Examples are too deep for an introductory study.
- Material is probably 300 or 400 level, needs to be brought back down to 100 introductory level.
- Seems like the linkages between articles, studies and introductory materials are too abstract.
- Need to sharpen writing to be more deliberate about linkages.
- Martin Luther is interesting to Theologians, but not laymen. Rethink overall purpose of article.
- Need to define Vocation early on very distinctly and uniquely and then unpack in future chapters.
- Thesis statements in each chapter need to have more punch and be similarly constructed so that they are identifiable.
- I have looked through your writing on work and I find the format very useful. I particularly like the way you've made the big ideas so clear and prominent. From reviewing them, I think the content will be very useful to a wide variety of audiences. I wasn't sure about the negative take on leisure in the last chapter. We tend to work six days a week here on the field and something seems to be squeezed out of our lives. Perhaps another chapter has a more positive take?
- When you use “repent” in the opening clause you need a deliberate “faith” concept that follows—it’s there, just be more specific.
- Do we “participate” in creation? Or model it? Do we exercise providence or are we agents of it? Do we actually redeem anything, or is that God’s work? I get what you’re saying, but we just need to be clear theologically about our relationships here.

- What about using verbs: creating, sustaining/stewarding, redeeming/restoring. I think “providence” and “redemption” carry a lot of theological baggage and assumptions that you don’t want to import. Changing the wording slightly will keep the concepts and maybe solve some other issues.
- Concerned that you are actually integrating the big idea/summary statement with the article in the third chapter, since this article was so well developed and has original material you’ll want to keep. I think the big thing is to focus on the intro of the article setting it up to say what you want. Key Issue: the relationship between this chapter and the previous and follow chapters. Seems like Chapter 2 sets up concept; This Chapter shows how people got it wrong; Chapter 4 and following should lay out what it looks like when you get it right.
- In rereading the article in Chapter 3, there is a slight conceptual disconnect—the study is about work; the article is about how people responded to a pluralistic culture. We need to shift the language in the article a bit to be sure we are still talking about “work” and haven’t taken a rabbit trail into “culture.” Possible Solution- Make an explicit statement that connects “here is how a Tax Collector” responded to culture; here’s what that same response looks like with regard to work.” “A Tax Collector responded to culture by doing X. You can see that same type of response to work by those who say/thing Y.” Setting it up this way makes the 4 “bad responses” biblical/historical teaching and makes a modern day application of that same world view to work.
- In Chapter 7, Bondservant really works for you here. You’re in a stronger position changing/adding a “The gospel changes work from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_”. A bondservant can be an e.g. of how this looks in the NT. At the same time we also need to account for the child dynamic. Not just bondservants but sons! Our identity (as Sons, established by God, through his work and nothing of our own) is what enables us to carry out the role of a bondservant (steward, agent, etc.) where we are called to unique roles. But what we do (the role) can never define who we are (the identity), though in a fallen world we often let that happen.
- In Chapter 8, I’m losing the thread here. Agent, bondservant, steward... none of those terms is standing out to me in terms of roles we play. Also wondering if these ideas are captured in the earlier reworks? Maybe yes, maybe no? Need to tighten and clarify.
- Reading through a conceptual outline and I’m having a hard time making the conceptual connections from one chapter to the next. That means that about 2% of your audience will be able to make those connections on their own. Possible Solution - I like what you’ve done with the paradigm bullets. To me that feels like the “heart” of the gospel stuff that you want to combine with the more “work as vocation” type material. For each chapter those ideas should be central. It’s really a case of going through to be sure you are clear in what you want to be saying. You’ve got the right bits, but need to cut, clean, and polish.

- I really like the exercise change in focus from a competitor to someone I'm called to love on behalf of Christ. That really resonates with me and I think most folks very rarely if ever think of things that way. It's a transformation that only the gospel can effect.
- I'm getting lost here conceptually in the Ambassador Chapter. It's more a need to "clean and refine" than switch directions. An ambassador is a good image, but as with the others, I'm not sure it helps you as much as a "Gospel changes work from X to Y" type statement. After you set it up that way, then using the idea of an ambassador to illustrate it is great; it's just not the center of what you want.
- Because we are secure by Christ's work (for worth, reputation, significance) we don't have to always be seeking those things from our own accomplishments (and thus competing with others feeling discouraged when we don't stack up and judgmental when we do). I don't disagree with the "love for strangers" - we should definitely go there in the article- but I think for most folks the real question isn't "should I love others" but "how do I love them when I really don't want to because I'm so obsessed about how I'm doing." You need that punch to make it sing.
- You need to try and give people a sense of how to be a "full orb'd" witness to others, which involves their actions, their integrity, how they treat people with grace, etc. in addition to anything else they may say explicitly. Too often people will speak up before they will own up to the ways they have sinned against others. I think introducing that idea (fits really well with sowing... how do you sow? You sow with actions, you sow with attitudes, you sow with words, etc.) fits well with the rest of what you are saying and would keep the emphasis off of the "apostolos" side of things, which is potentially confusing.
- Tone needs work. Rob "My Good Friend, and Fellow Struggler" has disappeared and been replaced by Rob "The D.Min Student Ready to Educate Me Up." I know it's hard to get the concepts right and the tone squared away at the same time. I think the content is just about there, so now it's time to work on the tone. "What would I say to the group sitting in my living room? How would you actually talk to them?"
- Our experience has shown that even when people agree with your point (e.g. you should rest more in Jesus and set aside your work and the gospel empowers you to do this), they still don't know how to practically live it out. That's the part that is still missing from chapter 10. The chapter tells us a lot of "true things" about sabbath rest, but it doesn't build the pathway that people will need to follow to move from "not resting well" to "resting well in Jesus, because of the freedom of the gospel."
- Article in Chapter 10 is already too long. Many of the paragraphs can be shortened without losing much. Remember, folks can only remember a few things at once, so

simply getting them to understand lead sentences in bold is really all you need. The much bigger challenge is to help them start to live those things out.

- The exercise in Chapter 10 is probably the best place to put the "how to's" That's where I think you really need to lay out what it will look like and sound like to "preach the gospel to yourself" in order to be freed to rest with Jesus and unplug from work. You may need to actually go through all the questions and provide sort of a running case study so that people will see the types of answers you're looking for.

**APPENDIX C:** Final Version of *The Gospel Centered Life at Work*

## INTRODUCTION

**LEADER'S NOTE:** *Read this introduction as a group or ask group members to read it before or after your first meeting. Whenever you read it, be sure to impress on everyone that they have a "calling" or vocation.*

We all long to find meaning in our work, to know that our work is valuable to others—and most of all to God. Yet we have all experienced circumstances at work that are hard, painful, and frustrating. Our difficulties show us how much we need God's help for our work to fulfill the good plans he has for this area of our lives.

This study is about the spiritual dynamics of work and life, and how God uses our work in the lifelong process of making us more like Christ. This study is a tool to help you build a bridge from your personal faith to your work. It will help you see how Jesus's work for you applies to the work you do every day. (This study builds on themes developed by Bob Thune and Will Walker in *The Gospel-Centered Life* and is meant to follow that study. If you haven't completed that study, you might consider doing so before beginning *The Gospel-Centered Life at Work*.)

God oversees every aspect of our lives, yet at the same time he gives us great freedom in the ways we can respond to our circumstances. The message of the gospel gives us a growing awareness that we are far more sinful than we once thought, but at the same time more dearly loved and accepted in Christ than we could ever imagine. Putting our entire trust in Jesus's work for us gives us the courage to be faithful sons and daughters who rely on God's Spirit for the everyday struggles we encounter as we work. Because of Christ's work that cleanses us from sin and unites us to God, his Spirit lives within us to bring us to repentance that restores and reorients us. In other words the Spirit works to make us more like Jesus (to sanctify us) as we work. This process includes two spiritual realities that happen simultaneously.

**THE DIVINE DYNAMIC:** God is changing us to make us more like Jesus through our work, and he uses the people around us (coworkers, customers, neighbors, bosses, peers, and subordinates, children, etc.) and the challenges of the work itself to do it. The good, the bad, the beautiful (even the ugly) are intended by our heavenly Father for our good and his glory as he restores all things. *The gospel is transforming us through the joys and challenges of daily life.*

**THE HUMAN DYNAMIC:** At the same time, God is using *us*, his people, as *agents* of change to sanctify and transform the world. We are the reflection of God's image, his workmanship, and his messengers of reconciliation in our homes, workplaces, and schools. God calls us to love and impact those around us through the work we do, wherever we do it. *God is transforming the neighborhoods of the world with the gospel through us.*

The Bible promises us that the gospel is constantly bearing fruit and growing (Colossians 1:6) in every sphere of our lives—in our home, work, leisure, and relationships. This is true for us as individuals and as communities of believers. Everything we do is being brought into the light of God’s glory as God’s power indwells and changes us (1 Corinthians 10:31). God invites us to live every part of our lives as worship and to rely on his strength rather than our own (Philippians 4:13).

Allowing our new identity as children of God to transform our work and daily life is a primary way believers participate in God’s work in this world. Life’s joys and challenges push us as believers toward God, where we ask him to reveal his purposes for us and to guide and empower us as we respond to the circumstances we face. As we ask, God reminds us that we are his beloved children. He encourages us to live by faith as unique reflections of Christ before a watching world. No matter how tarnished our reflection might be, the promises of the gospel encourage us to celebrate who we are in Christ and free us to trust the Spirit’s work as he further refines and polishes that reflection.

The way we reflect God’s character in our work will take many forms over the course of our lives. We don’t need to sit in an office, have a boss, or even receive a paycheck to be at “work.” Work from a biblical point of view is whatever activity a believer pursues in the sight of God, for the glory of God, to the benefit of others. As children, we begin our involvement with work by observing others. We become learners. Soon we become students and apprentices entering the world of work. From there we grow in responsibility to take care of our own household, seek a job, or pursue a career. Perhaps we’ll move from paid work to volunteering or a second unpaid career. No matter how old we are or what we do, as believers we are meant to see our daily activities as a “calling” or *vocation* given from God to honor and obey him.

To honor God in our work is rarely simple or formulaic. We face many complicated questions about the best way to reflect his presence in our lives. At times we may sense that God is clearly directing every detail of our day and that we are empowered by his Holy Spirit. At other times, our sin and the sin of others seem to complicate every interaction and decision. That’s when we are reminded of our need for the power and reality of Jesus to guide our work and our lives.

- The gospel is *for* us when we see people sin against one another, but we don’t know how to respond as children who bear God’s image and are called to imitate his ways.
- The gospel is *for* us when work is hard and meaningless, because the Spirit gives meaning to our circumstances, enabling us to love and serve selflessly.

- The gospel is *for* us when we don't know how to relate to a coworker, boss, client, or subordinate, because God's Holy Spirit is powerful enough to change us and give us insight into other's needs.

We need to remember that Jesus offers us forgiveness from sin, as well as the Spirit's power to understand how the promises of the gospel apply to our particular circumstances.

In this study we'll examine the ways the early church described living by faith, honoring God, and demonstrating our calling as God's people in the work he has given to us. The Bible describes believers as ***Image-bearers and Imitators, Bond-servants and Stewards, Ambassadors and Messengers.*** All of these roles have relevance to the work we do. We'll consider these concepts in their first century context to get a fuller sense of how the Bible can encourage us and help us apply our faith to the work we do every day.

# LESSON 1

## THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE: GOD REALIGNS US TO WORK

### BIG IDEA

For many of us, work is just a set of things we must do—jobs and activities that can be stressful, unfulfilling, and demanding, and that seem to have little to do with God. For others, work is what defines and gives personal value or significance. But God has something better in mind for his children than either of these options. A gospel-centered understanding of work—which puts Christ and what he has done for us at the center of all we do—transforms work from a set of things we do for survival or validation to become our *vocation*, a calling from Jesus to love, serve, and follow him. This makes work one of the primary ways we respond to God in gratitude for all he has done for us in Christ. It's also a primary way we participate with God's people to bring healing, hope, and gospel witness to a broken world.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Bible Conversation: | Read and talk about the passages(s)                        |
| Article:            | <i>A Deeper Understanding of Vocation</i>                  |
| Discussion:         | Process <i>A Deeper Understanding of Vocation</i> together |
| Exercise:           | <i>Extraordinary Purposes in Ordinary Work</i>             |
| Wrap-Up:            | Final thoughts and prayer                                  |

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

We are focusing on three big questions in this lesson.

1. What is our functional set of beliefs (not the spiritual “right” answer, but what we really think) as we approach work and daily life?
2. What were work and life designed by God to look like?
3. How does the gospel speak into the gap between these two realities (1 and 2)?

The questions and Bible passages we explore will highlight the differences between our actual beliefs and what God intends.

They also point to our need for the Holy Spirit to

- continually refocus us on God as we go about our work,
- fill us with faith to trust and depend on him, and
- grow us in our love for God and others as we go about our daily callings.

## SET-UP

It can be hard to see our life as a seamless, interwoven fabric that integrates our personal faith with the work God has called us to do. Given society's distrust of faith in the marketplace and our own brokenness, we are tempted to keep faith and work separate. We may want to live for Christ in everything we do, but our faith often winds up being confined to the private sphere of life. Our work doesn't reflect the fact that it is something God has prepared for us to do. Instead it simply comes to reflect our own goals, desires, and methods for getting what we want. We don't even know how to ask how faith in Christ connects with what we're doing.

When this happens, work takes on a role in our lives it was never intended to have. For some, work comes to feel like a burden, something we simply "have to do" in order to survive. For others, it becomes the center of our lives, a false but powerful source of identity. But neither option reflects a gospel-centered understanding of work, which acknowledges that our work was distorted by the fall but has been made new in Christ as a way to live out our calling from God.

If our perspective on work is mostly about just surviving, we will look to leisure as a deliverance from the daily grind ("I'm working for the weekend. I just can't wait until I'm retired.") If we see work as the center and focus of life that gives meaning, purpose, and gratification, we'll be too busy to do anything else. ("I'll spend time with my family and church when I finish this project. What I do *is* who I am.") This first lesson digs deeper into assumptions like these that minimize our calling from Jesus and their impact on our work lives. We will also consider what it means to be called into partnership with God in our daily life.

ASK: What excites you or brings you joy about what you do at work/school/home?

ASK: What things drive you crazy about life at work/school/home?  
Why do you do what you do at work/school/home?

ASK: Would you take on your current role (worker/student/caregiver) if you didn't have to? If you didn't need a paycheck to make ends meet, what would you do?

Next, let's look at some Bible passages that deal with the good and bad in our work.

READ: The first passages we want to look at are Genesis 1:26-2:2, Genesis 2:15, and Genesis 3:17-24.

ASK: What do these passages say about God's relationship to us? What do these passages say about how we respond to God?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** We're primarily looking for answers about the kinds of work God is engaged in here. God's work reflects his character. He creates by making something out of nothing. He sustains all he has made. He comes to redeem what has been broken. We also see that we've been created to bear his image and called to reflect his character. He models both work and rest for us as created beings who enjoy relationship with him, imitate him, and learn from him. Life before our fall into sin was simple, good, and relational. God created a garden for our provision and enjoyment, to give us legitimate, dignifying work in partnership with him while we met our physical needs. God also provided us with boundaries (rest and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) for our work.

The passage that deals with the fall tells us that even after we sin, God provides for us. We see that we tend to ignore God's boundaries and warnings and often avoid repentance without God's prodding. Finally, we see that even in the midst of toil, sweat, and pain of our work today, we have God's imprint on us in our underlying desire for relationship with our Creator and for purpose and meaning in our work.

**READ:** The final passage we want to look at in this lesson is Romans 8:11-22.

**ASK:** What does this passage say about God's relationship to us? What does this passage say about how we respond to God?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** When we trust in Christ to forgive our sins and bring us into God's family, all things become new, starting with the spiritual life he gives us and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit within us. We respond to God by giving him our whole lives in love and service. God adopts us and we respond by calling him "*Abba Father*." God makes us heirs; we respond by sharing in the sufferings of Jesus. God is glorifying us alongside Jesus. We look forward to our ultimate glorification because it represents our freedom and a return to the way life was meant to be. In fact, the whole creation eagerly awaits the renewal and restoration God will someday complete.

**TRANSITION TO ARTICLE:** These passages give us a biblical understanding of God's calling to follow him in all spheres of life, including the work he gives us. God's design is for men and women to know themselves as partners in his continuing work in the world. Through our work and by his power, even now God is redeeming, sustaining, and re-creating all things. To get a fuller understanding of this reality, let's read an article together and then go through some discussion questions.

## ARTICLE

**TURN TO ARTICLE: *A Deeper Understanding of Vocation.***  
Read aloud, taking turns at the breaks between paragraphs.

**LEADER'S NOTE:** We're not looking for terribly profound answers to the following questions. Instead we want the group to draw one or two meaningful ideas from this lesson. Hopefully this will move group members from cynicism about the fallenness and drudgery of work to recognition that work is a gift from God with the potential to be used for good.

## DISCUSSION

Let's think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: What ideas from the article resonated with you?

ASK: How does a gospel perspective drive this new way of viewing work?

ASK: How does a gospel perspective correct and challenge some of the misguided ways we might have come to understand our work?

Let's make these ideas a little more personal.

ASK: How might making Jesus the functional center of your life change the way you view your work?

## EXERCISE

We've begun exploring our need to exchange misguided views of work for ones better aligned with God's Word, Jesus's work on our behalf, and his purposes for us.

***Extraordinary Purposes in Ordinary Work*** helps us see simple ways we participate in God's work that may be obscured by our cultural assumptions. In this exercise, you'll see how your everyday work parallels God's work of Creation, Provision and Redemption in the world.

TURN TO the ***Extraordinary Purposes in Ordinary Work*** exercise. If there is time, read through the exercise and have the group brainstorm some ideas to get started. You can also assign these exercises for homework if you're running out of time.

## WRAP – UP

Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

# A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF VOCATION

A friend who just lost his job sits across from you with tears in his eyes. "I know I have a purpose," he says. "I need to know that what I do matters, that I'm doing what God wants me to do."

A young mom shares with her friends at playgroup, "I just wasn't prepared for the drudgery of caring for a baby. I love her so much, but how do you cope with doing the same thing day after day on little or no sleep?"

"My work is so stressful," a hard-working executive confesses. "Even when I'm home I'm connected to work electronically. I know my family wishes I wasn't always 'checking in,' but they don't understand what's expected of me. I don't even have the time to think about God and what he wants. It seems like just one more thing to do."

"I'm trying to get my schoolwork done, but everyone around me is partying," a college student says. "I don't know if I'll get a job when I graduate anyway, so usually I go for the fun. I'm a Christian, but I don't know how that connects to life right now. Maybe I'll work on that later."

"Homeschooling my children was so much work, but I loved it," a mom said. "But now my oldest son doesn't want to go to church or do anything. What was it all for?"

How about you? Most likely you also have questions about the meaning, significance, and motivation for what you do. We all want the work we do to make a difference, yet we feel the gap between the realities of daily work and our lives as Christians.

We wonder:

- Am I doing the right thing?
- What should I do with the rest of my life?
- My work is unpaid; does that mean it's not important?
- Why is work so stressful?
- What if I lose my job? Who will provide for my family?
- Why do I get so afraid when I make a mistake at work?
- Is it possible to go to work and not get involved in gossip and politics?
- Am I a good parent?
- Is what I'm doing making a difference?

These questions are not just about work. They are spiritual questions about faith, meaning, significance, identity, and the struggle with sin. The struggle to bring work and faith together is as old as the fall of humanity. Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, they experienced God's good gifts of work, childbirth, and relationships as broken and

hard. We know this isn't the way it's meant to be, but we wonder how (and if) our lives can be made whole again.

In Genesis 1 and 2, we see God at work, creating, separating, filling, examining, and declaring all things good. God's intent was for human life to bind together work, family, personal spirituality, and worship into a seamless tapestry. The need to apply faith to work wasn't necessary before the fall, since Adam and Eve enjoyed a perfect relationship with God, each other, and creation. One day in the future, the effects of the fall will come to an end. We will see the end result of Christ's first and second comings. All of life will be made new. Heaven will come to earth and sin, sorrow, suffering, and brokenness will be banished. Life in its fullest sense will be restored through Christ's completed work.

Right now we live "in between." Life is still broken, but something new has happened. God has come to earth to be with his people. Jesus, God-with-us, purchased healing and wholeness for us by his death on the cross. When we come to him in faith and repentance, our sins are forgiven. We are given the gift of eternal life and a whole new life right now. The power that raised Christ from the dead is now working to remake us and everything we do (Ephesians 1). This is the essence of the gospel message.

Because of these realities, even the simplest tasks we perform by faith become acts of worship reflecting God's character and ways. This is the new *vocation* or calling of those who live by faith. Faith changes everything we do. The sixteenth-century Christian reformer Martin Luther put it this way:

When a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other menial task for his child in Christian faith, God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> (Author Paraphrase)

Do you see how living by faith can transform our idea of vocation? By faith we depend on Jesus to walk with us. We rely on his Spirit to guide us so that our relationship with Christ brings life to the wearisome, broken aspects of life. We can participate in God's work wherever he has called us. Whatever our role—student, dishwasher, waitress, stay-at-home mom, working mom, office staff, church staff, small business owner, doctor, plumber, artist, contractor—we do all things with Christ, because of him, and with the Spirit's help (Philippians 4:13).

Christ transforms our work from something we do to fulfill our own goals into something much more significant. All our work becomes kingdom work, done in the service of the King for his good purposes. This gives meaning and significance to the simplest of tasks. Christ called us to live for him; he prepared good works for us to do, and as we respond in faith, we realize that all we do is in his hands (Ephesians 2:8-10).

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, adapted from "The Estate of Marriage," (1522) in *Luther's Works Volume 45: Christian in Society II. Walther I Brandt, Editor.* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1962), 41.

This is what vocation means for those who know Jesus. It's not something relegated to a narrow sector of life. *Everything* is transformed.

The idea of partnering with God through your vocation may not be the way you naturally think about life. For some, life feels like a burden when we don't see that God is sustaining the world and advancing his kingdom through us, his children. For others, work becomes something we hope will provide things we think God can't or won't give us—what the Bible calls our idols. Work then becomes a way to pursue those idols, and ultimately pursue meaning and fulfillment apart from Christ. We don't really believe that Christ alone can truly satisfy us. When that happens, work soon becomes a trap where we are either proud of what we have achieved or discouraged by our failures.

Our tendencies will always be to minimize God's presence in our work, making everything a grind for survival, *or* to elevate our own efforts and accomplishments apart from God. In light of this we must see that the believer's work is a partnership with Jesus, who already achieved success on our behalf and offers mercy and grace in every struggle (Hebrews 4:14–16). We need to hold onto gospel truths to live out our vocation in this broken world. These truths include:

- *Daily forgiveness*: we need the forgiveness Jesus purchased for us on the cross for the ways we live for our work instead of God's purposes (1 John 1:9–10).
- *Daily help from the Spirit*: We need the Spirit to change us so that we live for God as partners in his kingdom (Luke 11:13).
- *Daily faith perspective*: We need God to help us see life from his perspective instead of our own (Ephesians 2:8).
- *Resurrection power*: We have to ask for the power that raised Christ from the dead to give us strength and help (Ephesians 1:15–23).
- *God's power and control*: When work goes badly wrong, when we or others fail, we need to remember that God has the final word. All things work for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes (Romans 8:28).

Meaningful work is not all there is to life, but a meaningful life is not possible without the knowledge that God is at work, using our everyday efforts for his extraordinary purposes. As we make the gospel the true center of our work, God will use us in his kingdom and use our work struggles to make us more like him.

# EXERCISE

## EXTRAORDINARY PURPOSES IN ORDINARY WORK

This exercise is designed to help you think about your work in a new way—as a partnership with God. God does three amazing things in this world: he makes something out of nothing (creation); he stays in charge of everything he has made (providence), and he restores what's broken (redemption).

As you partner with God in your work, you are also creating, providing, and redeeming. It's easy to miss this, so this exercise will give you a chance to think about how different aspects of your abilities and work reflect your partnership with God. Before you begin, take a moment to think about how your work fits into these three categories of God's work:

- Creative work (work such as designing, development, and artistic endeavors)
- Providing work (production and distribution of services or goods for others' benefit)
- Redemptive work (fixing brokenness, relieving toil, and removing pain)

Note: It's okay if you don't fill in every answer or if you just fill in one of the three aspects. To get you started we've given examples from different jobs and suggested how they might connect to the three aspects. The list isn't exhaustive, but it can help you think of ways that your work is connected to God's work.

### EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE ASPECTS

"I enjoy creating products, methods, services or ideas." (e.g., engineer, chemist, teacher, author, student)

"I construct new spaces or organizations." (e.g., contractor, electrician, homeowner, plumber, entrepreneur)

"I like to find ways to connect people who wouldn't normally hang out." (e.g., home group leader, person who loves hospitality)

"I help give birth to people, ideas, or beauty." (e.g., parent, artist, musician, pastor, writer, poet)

"I look for creative ways to talk about Jesus with those around me." (e.g., anyone)

"I envision roles for other people that they themselves don't see yet." (e.g., educator, manager, trainer)

### EXAMPLES OF PROVIDING ASPECTS

"I assist people in finding shelter that meets the needs of their household." (e.g., social worker, realtor)

"I help in the harvesting and/or restoring of natural resources." (e.g., farmer, biochemist, engineer)

"I assist in providing the efficient use of a utility." (e.g., utility worker for water, electric, gas, etc.)

"I help people govern themselves in a way that promotes flourishing." (e.g., politician, activist)

"I educate people and provide a place for community and learning." (e.g., educator, parent)

"I help others find space (time or place) to pursue rest and leisure." (e.g., artist, musician, park ranger)

### EXAMPLES OF REDEMPTIVE ASPECTS

"I help physically, spiritually, or psychologically broken people." (e.g., counselor, social worker, pastor, HR specialist)

"I help to reconcile broken relationships." (e.g., friend, guidance counselor, labor specialist)

"I clean, fix, repair things or people affected by the fall." (e.g., HVAC repair, mechanic, handyman, tailor)

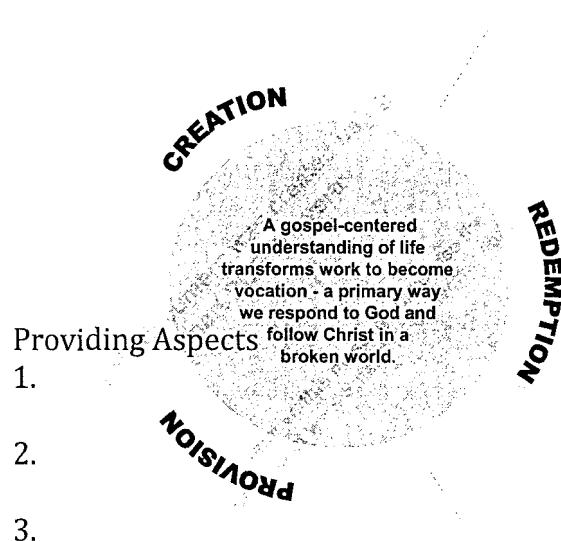
"I troubleshoot to avoid potential problems." (e.g., engineer, network administrator, programmer)

"I fight or prevent criminal activity and promote ethical behavior." (e.g., judge, lawyer, watchman)  
"I assist and give hope to people in personal or natural disasters." (e.g., fireman, policeman, military)

In the spaces below, take a few minutes to jot down how your work reflects aspects of God's work.

Creative Aspects

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Providing Aspects

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Redemptive Aspects

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

LEADER'S NOTES: If you do this as a group exercise rather than take it home, encourage people to share their insights after everyone has had time to think about their answers.

## LESSON 2

# TRANSFORMATION: GOD USES WORK TO CHANGE US

### BIG IDEA

Work was created to be a good thing, but after the fall it became one of the main areas where our sin and brokenness shows up. However, our workplaces are not beyond God's care and purpose. He is more than able to use the fallen things in life to grow us to be more like Christ. If we keep the truths of the gospel in mind as we pursue our work, it elevates work from a daily grind to the space where God is at work in us to deepen our relationship to him, to one another, and to creation, as we partner with him in his plans and purposes.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passages(s)

Article: *The Daily Grind*

Discussion: Process concepts of *The Daily Grind* together

Exercise: *How Work Reveals Our Hearts*

Wrap-Up: Final thoughts and prayer

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Since we spend so much time working (at school, marketplace, home, etc.) the workplace is the primary setting for our vocational partnership with God. And, simultaneously it's also potentially one of the most significant places for our personal transformation into the likeness of Christ. Neither one happens if we keep our work separate from the promises and purposes we discover in the gospel. Instead, work can become a burden that is empty of meaning—or take over our lives as a great, but false, source of value. As an alternative, we can understand work from a gospel perspective and allow it to draw us to rely on Christ in greater ways.

### SET-UP

At breakfast one morning my friend Charlie confided in me, "My work is awful. I just want to quit because ...." Maybe you know how you would finish Charlie's statement. As we discussed last time, work was designed as part of God's good creation and as a way for us to partner with God in the stewardship of his world. Like every other aspect of our lives, sin has twisted our relationship toward work so that it has the dual capacity to be filled with toil and trouble as well as joy and beauty. Too often our temptation is to retreat and look for ways to protect ourselves from potential trouble and temptation. Although this is a natural response, it can short-circuit the plans God may have for us. He is always encouraging us to rely on him more deeply by faith, even in the midst of trials, temptations, and suffering. He wants us to call out to him in our distress, so that he can meet us and spiritually transform us and our workplaces in the hard times.

First, consider Charlie's comment: "My work is awful. I just want to quit because . . . "

ASK: If you were saying that to a trusted friend, how would you end that sentence?

Let's consider a gospel perspective on suffering and persevering in times of trial.

ASK: Why might Paul be particularly qualified to talk about God's care in times of trial and testing? What parts of Paul's story help us understand his qualifications?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** Paul underwent trial and imprisonment for his faith in Christ. He spoke of his thorn in the flesh and his record of religious achievement before meeting Christ. He knew what it is to suffer and what it is to be delivered.

Let's see what Paul says to the churches in Rome and Corinth about this topic. The first is a passage we looked at in the last lesson, but one which is useful here as well.

READ: Romans 8:18-21

READ: 1 Corinthians 10:13

ASK: What benefits does Paul suggest come through suffering and testing?

ASK: How is God present with us during these times?

**LEADER'S NOTE:**

Because times of trial and testing in life are universal, you can count on group members to refer to times of personal trial. Affirm any ideas that align with Paul's thoughts in the passages, but then encourage group members to consider the benefits Paul lists in Romans 8 and 1 Corinthians 10. Here are some:

- 4) Suffering increases our longing for creation to be released from bondage and our desire for greater freedom from sin as God's children.
- 5) Temptations offer us a chance to see God's faithfulness in our time of need.
- 6) Resisting temptation strengthens our reliance on God as our deliverer in times of trial.

Now let's consider what James says about the importance of both our beliefs and actions in times of trial and temptation.

READ: James 1:2-12

ASK: What are three things James says about the value of trials and temptations?

**LEADERS NOTE:** James talks about three similar things trials are a form of testing that produces (1) Steadfastness in faith, (2) Completeness or wholeness and unity with Christ / Crown of Life, (3) Wisdom that comes through experience.

Finally, consider your own testing and refining.

ASK: How have you found these principles to be relevant in your own life?

## ARTICLE

**TRANSITION TO ARTICLE:** We want to think more deeply about personal hardships as we read about the suffering present in daily life. Try to think of ways the personal experiences of trial, temptation, toil, and suffering might relate to the categories developed in ***The Daily Grind*** article we'll read together.

**TURN TO:** ***The Daily Grind*** article in your Participants Guide. Read aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

## DISCUSSION

**LEADER'S NOTE:** Like last time, profound answers aren't critical here. We want folks to track with the article and take one or two nuggets of truth home with them, especially as it relates to God's purposes being worked out in times of trouble. God's love for us is never thwarted by sin. He is always caring and providing for us, even in times of temptation or trial. For this reason we can resist and grieve suffering as hardship, but also accept it because it has been sifted through God's hands to help us rely more deeply by faith on his strength.

Let's think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: What are some of your initial thoughts about this article?

ASK: Do you believe God puts us in situations of toil, trial, and testing?

Let's make these ideas a little more personal.

ASK: Where has God placed you in situations of toil, trial, or testing?

ASK: Are you a person who is more likely to resist or to accept hardship in your life?

ASK: Why might both resisting AND accepting hardship be important responses for us as people who proclaim Christ to others?

## EXERCISE

We're exploring how God uses situations to transform our character by aligning us with his character and purposes *and* exposing our sinful motivations. ***How Work Reveals Our Hearts*** helps us identify ways that our perspective on work might be clouded by wrong, self-centered motivations rather than a Christ-centered perspective.

TURN TO: ***How Work Reveals Our Hearts***. Review the activity with the group and encourage participants to work on the exercise this coming week.

## WRAP-UP

Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

### THE DAILY GRIND

It would be crazy to think that *all* of the work we do is exciting, fulfilling, or even good for us. Yes, we were made *to* work, but not *for* work; we were made for God. As part of God's good creation, work was intended to bless us and to glorify him. But since the fall, these positive aspects of work are harder to see. Work's fallen nature is easier to relate to. Just as we can look for the three aspects of work's inherent goodness in our daily work (the creative, providential, and redemptive), we also see three fallen aspects. In Genesis 3 we see that our broken relationship with God has brought about "toil" or meaninglessness to our work; our failure in relationships has created a selfish "rule" or bent to all the things we do; and the brokenness and decay of creation has produced "futility" or a fruitlessness to work as we try to be productive.

Consider these work struggles and how they highlight the meaninglessness, selfishness, and futility we experience at work:

- John worked hard at creating a marketing campaign for a new product. The campaign went great until John found out that Kyle (who reports to John) had gone behind John to his boss, claiming credit for the campaign.
- Sarita's coworkers are padding their time sheets. They want her to pad hers too, so it won't look like they are working more hours than she is.
- Susan teaches fifth grade. Henry, a student in her class, doesn't pay attention or complete his homework. Last week, after report cards, Henry's dad called and yelled at her for being a terrible teacher.
- Charles is a plumber. The contractor he is working with is doing shoddy work. Charles doesn't want to lose the job, but he feels badly for the homeowners, who aren't getting quality work.
- June is always bragging about her kids. According to her, they are the smartest, fastest, and most creative kids in the world.
- Sam lays carpet for a living. After forty years his knees are giving way. He doesn't have much saved and doesn't know how he can afford to retire.
- Jessica just realized that she made a major accounting error that will cost her company thousands of dollars. She wonders if she should cover it up.

Each of these issues—competitiveness, betrayal, lack of integrity, covering up mistakes, worries about the future, and the never-ending search for identity and security—are directly related to the way the fall has affected our work. Apart from Jesus and his work in us, work creates a downward spiral where *meaninglessness* in

life produces *selfishness* in our hearts, which leads to *fruitlessness* in our work. Solomon's question in Ecclesiastes still rings true: "What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest" (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23).

These are all fuel for the nagging doubts that wake us up in the small hours of the morning. We count on others, only to have them disappoint or betray us. We work hard but are overlooked, or circumstances keep us from getting ahead. We make a costly mistake that affects those we work with. It doesn't matter who you are or what you do—executive, student, missionary, mother, or factory worker—work can feel like a heavy burden. But it doesn't have to be this way. God is a Father who loves his children. He uses all of our struggles, including those at work, to bring us back to him and to make us like him.

Our work was never intended to satisfy us in the ways God can, so when we pursue work apart from him, sooner or later it *will* feel empty. That emptiness is one of God's gifts—a reminder that God alone is big and strong enough to be the source of our comfort, security, success, and acceptance. Our desperation can lead us to reorient our hearts and lives toward the gospel. The truth is that our problems at work have to do with *our* sins as much as the sins of others. Those we work with are not the only ones who struggle with gossip, self-promotion, competitiveness, lack of integrity, boredom, etc. We struggle too.

Think about the examples above. At work we want to be appreciated and treated well. We want things to go smoothly. We want others to think well of us. There is nothing wrong with these things. But what happens when you are betrayed? When you might lose your job if you do the right thing? When others treat you unfairly? What is revealed about what you value most? What is more important to you than your relationship with God? Without the gospel of Jesus, it would be so easy to go along with the broken world...

- for John to gossip about Kyle and try to manipulate his boss too
- for Sarita to cheat along with her coworkers
- for Susan to live in fear of Henry's father
- for Charles to ignore the contractor's shoddy work
- for June to center her life on her children and their successes
- for Sam to fear the future
- for Jessica to try to cover up her mistake

But it is right here, in these struggles, that John, Sarita, Susan, Charles, June, Sam, Jessica, and *you* have the opportunity to see how much you need Jesus. You need his forgiveness. You need his power to return good for evil. You need his Spirit to guide you when you don't know the best way forward. You need him if you are going to bring the light of God's love into your workplace. The Spirit wants to use your

struggles at work to remind you of your need for Christ and to drive you to him in repentance and faith.

As we cry out to God in honesty about our fears and frustrations, we become open to what God has for us. The Spirit is able to show us how to walk in repentance and faith. We notice where God is already working. We can be thankful. We turn from the things in our work that we have made more important than God—stuff like people’s approval, being right, security, comfort, and identity. We believe in the forgiveness of sins and offer forgiveness to others. We are able to trust God with work’s everyday difficulties and ask for his help.

We don’t have to be stuck in our sins or in those committed against us. We can relate to God differently because of what Jesus has done, and come to God as beloved sons and daughters. The gospel that is redeeming and transforming our hearts is the same gospel at work to renew and heal the world.

In Romans 8:20–30 Paul says that God is allowing all of creation (not just you and me) to be frustrated by sin. We all feel the toil and pain that come from it. God does this so that our needy state would push us toward Christ, so that we would know the freedom he gives us as children of God. At the point of our deep weakness—in our futility and despair—the Spirit can help us cry out for aid from our heavenly Abba Father to intervene in things beyond our control. With “groaning too deep for words,” even in hard circumstances, God is working things together for our good and his glory.

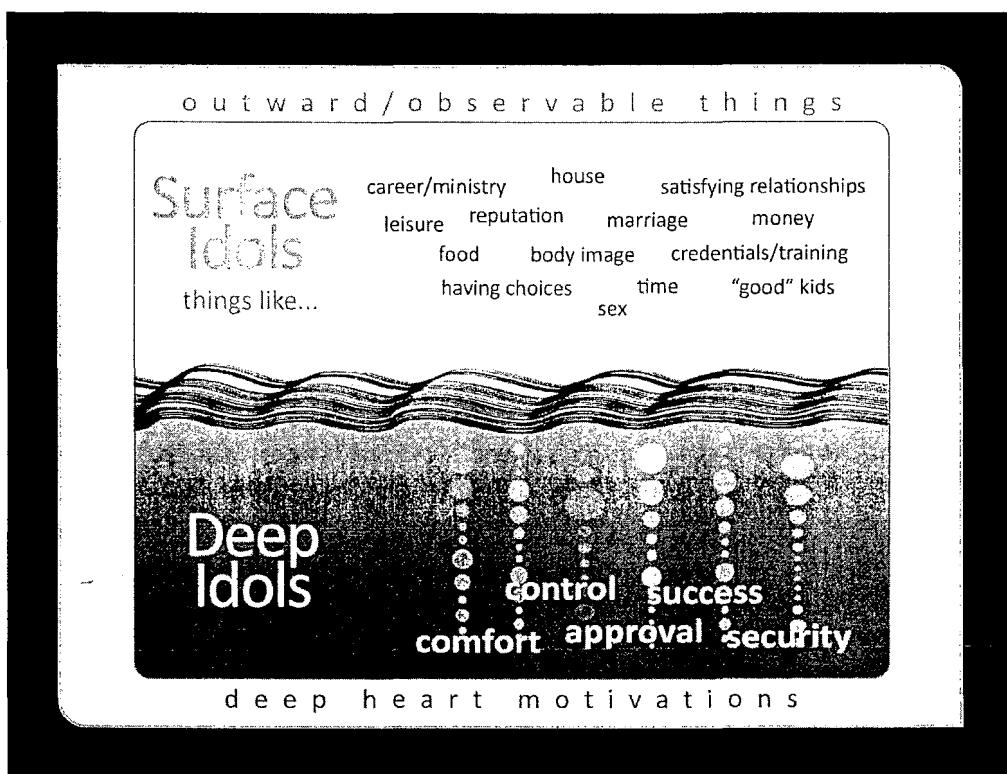
A life of ease is not necessarily an indicator of God’s presence. The Bible says that the opposite can be true as well—that trials and trouble can also indicate God’s faithful presence and deep love for us (2 Timothy 2:10–12). First Peter 1:7 says that while it is okay to grieve over various trials, we should also rejoice because trials test the genuineness of our faith and refine us while bringing praise, glory, and honor to Christ.

We can and should be frustrated, disappointed, and even angered by the ways sin has broken everything (the loss of a job for a righteous decision, broken relationships, credit for your good work going to someone else, financial rewards that don’t materialize, posturing and posing by others, etc.). But it is not okay to accept things as they are. The Spirit stands ready to do more than we can do in our own strength. We must make room for him and in repentance and faith hold to God’s promises to us. Because Jesus is with us, work is no longer a burden we bear alone. Instead, it is shared by Jesus, an opportunity to experience God’s love more deeply and to be transformed in and through the struggles, challenges, and disappointment of work. All this happens in the power of the Spirit and in light of the truth of the gospel.

## EXERCISE HOW WORK REVEALS OUR HEARTS

Let's begin identifying the ways we look to something other than Jesus to provide us with satisfaction in life. Because work so often touches our deepest needs for significance, success, and security for ourselves and our families, it is a prime place to see where our hearts are drawn to something other than Jesus and his purposes. Whether we spend our days as a student, executive, stay-at-home parent, or caregiver for an aging parent, we all struggle with keeping the gospel at the center of what we do. The toilsome and painful parts of work always cause us to ask, "Is Jesus enough to truly satisfy me?" or "Am I relying on my work to provide me with something I think Jesus either cannot or will not give me?"

Take a look at the chart below. It describes the way our deeper heart motivations are revealed by the importance we put on external things.



*Surface idols tend to be concrete, specific items that are often good and basic things in our life and work. When they come under the control of our deeper idols, however, they go from being good things to ultimate things—things we think we simply must*

*have, often at any cost. As good and basic things, most of the time they continue to remain in our work and life, but they need to be “put in their place” by applying the gospel to detach them from deep idols and put them under the guidance of the Spirit.*

**Deep idols** are the subtle, basic motivations for work that exist at the level of personal drives and character traits nurtured over a lifetime. Because they are so deeply embedded, they tend to express themselves indirectly through good and basic things, turning them into ultimate motivations. Often a single deep idol can manifest itself in a number of different outward actions and attitudes. Applying the gospel to these deep idols helps us repent of seeking what they offer apart from God.

As you look at the chart, discuss the following questions:

1. In your work life, where do you tend to struggle with “good and basic” things becoming “ultimate” things? (List below a few of the “good and basic” things that are operating as surface motivations.)

(a)

(b)

(c)

2. What do you *really* want from these “good and basic” things? What deeper fears, idols or desires might subtly underlie your list of surface idols to make the “good and basic” things “ultimate” things in your work?

(a)

(b)

(c)

3. When it comes to your work, how would you complete the following phase, based on your answers to the two previous questions?

Jesus + \_\_\_\_\_ = my happiness

4. Start the repentance process by writing out a prayer, telling God what is most important to you and why. Ask him to forgive you for not trusting in his love and care. Ask him for his Spirit to help you put him first in your life and to remind you when you try to find life apart from him.

## LESSON 3

# FROM TOIL TO FAITH: DESIRING A NEW WAY TO LIVE

### BIG IDEA

This lesson helps us identify patterns in the ways we fail to integrate our faith with our work. These patterns often point to the deep idols that undermine the way we relate to our heavenly Father and our neighbors as well. First, we'll see how our "functional idols" might be affecting our behavior; then we'll consider the ways we need to repent and welcome the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Our status as God's children compels us to put off sin and to put on a new way of living by faith—to shed old ways of relating and to welcome new gospel-centered ones instead (Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3). A gospel-centered understanding of work leads us to repent of "bent" coping patterns and deep idols and to more fully participate in God's work in the world as we are conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passages

Article: ***Our Flawed Methods***

Discussion: Think through some personal implications of a Christ-centered perspective and imagine new ways of relating to those around you

Exercise: ***Pretending and Performing at Work***

Wrap-Up: Final thoughts and prayer

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Understanding all that Jesus has accomplished for us enables us to see our daily lives as a partnership with God in his work in the world. He wants our lives to reflect his passionate heart for a restored creation and redeemed humanity. God also desires that we do all we do to his glory and honor. We've looked at how God uses the hard things in our work to make us more like Jesus, and how those tests and trials can lead us to repent and turn from the deeper idols that have motivated us. In this lesson we'll talk about how and why we often give in to functional idols that hinder the power of Christ in our work. We call the patterns that minimize the gospel's impact on our lives *pretending* and *performing*. Resisting God's work in our lives always involves one of these two patterns. *Pretense* minimizes sin by making ourselves out to be something we are not and *performance* reduces God's standards to something we can meet.

### SET-UP

Each of the following parables involves people who experienced God's love and provision but failed to *put off* false ways of relating and *put on* truth. They chose to

be controlled by their appetites and the pressures of life rather than live in light of the truth they had experienced from God. These stories may seem familiar to you. As you read them, put yourself in the position of the main character who is failing to grasp the truth.

**READ:** The first parable is the story of the unmerciful servant, one of a number of stories Jesus told when a Zealot asked him who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Would someone read Matthew 18:21-35 aloud?

**ASK:** How did the servant fail in his response?  
What should his response have been?

**ASK:** Can you remember a time when you failed to be merciful, forgiving, and generous despite the fact that God has been merciful, forgiving, and generous to you? Have you held others to standards in the workplace (or elsewhere) that you can't meet yourself? What does that reveal about your reliance on the gospel's power in your life?

**READ:** Our second story is about the lost sons, told in response to the Pharisees' complaint that Jesus was hanging out with sinners and tax collectors. One son clings to his own righteousness and one begs for forgiveness. In this reading put yourself in the place of the brother who does everything right but resents his father's generosity toward his sibling. Will someone read Luke 15:11-32 for us?

**ASK:** You may work or live alongside people who think like the older brother. They do not live in light of the Father's love for them, but live in the light of their own rightness, viewing themselves falsely and dispensing justice when mercy is required. Such people may justify and build themselves up but miss the bigger picture of how much they've been loved and forgiven. Some may become overtly dishonest; others are more subtle. How do you relate to them?

**ASK:** How does the Father relate to the older brother?

**ASK:** How does the story of the two brothers and generous father speak to your own struggles of missing the gospel with performance and pretense, and with being proud of your performance more than you are grateful for God's mercy?

## ARTICLE

Every context we move into has its own set of values and expectations. As we move from context to context and encounter those new expectations, they can easily overwhelm us so that we forget our partnership in the kingdom of God and God's call on our lives. The way out of this forgetfulness is repentance that flows from knowledge of the righteousness of Christ, and knowledge that we are beloved children of our heavenly Father. As we remember whose we are, we also need to understand what we are repenting from and what we are being conformed to. In

***Our Flawed Methods*** we'll examine a few of the approaches that "religious" people often take as they relate to the context of their daily life and work. Then we'll discuss an alternative gospel approach.

READ: ***Our Flawed Methods***.

## DISCUSSION

### LEADER'S NOTE:

It might be hard for group members to come up with examples if this is their first time hearing about performance and pretense. Don't push it if this exercise seems too abstract for some. The goal is simply to help the group recognize the underlying pitfalls of pretense and performance, and how these might surface in their own work situations.

ASK: Where have you seen these flawed approaches of pretense and performance?

ASK: How is accepting these "old" ways dangerous for us?

ASK: How are you tempted to succumb to this thinking in your work, home, or school?

ASK: What would it look like to be a gospel presence in your current environment?

ASK: What are some old ways you need to put off or new ways you can put on?

### EXERCISE

How do we miss opportunities for gospel transformation in our own lives? Are we blind to the influences around us that sway us from the gospel? To gain a better understanding of the way we're impacted by performance and pretense here's an exercise to help decode the patterns of your daily life.

TURN TO: ***Pretending and Performing at Work***

### WRAP-UP

Ask God to open your eyes to his work and presence this week.

## ARTICLE

# OUR FLAWED METHODS

In the Bible God often called his people to live in the midst of pluralistic societies—Egypt, Canaan, Babylon, and the Roman Empire.<sup>2</sup> As postmodern people, we live in similar circumstances. Even though Western culture was built on biblical values, our society is now almost completely pluralistic and often antagonistic to the gospel. How should we live in such a society and how can we engage those around us where we study, live, work, and play?

- Your supervisor says “Copy these articles and get them to the client by the end of the week!” You both know that the articles were copyrighted by a direct competitor. To copy them would be wrong (they aren’t your company’s intellectual property), but to quit your job over a foolish demand feels wrong too. You’ve invested years of your life in this place to try and make a difference—and you need the income.
- Class rank will affect your opportunities for internships and grad school recommendations. Your closest competitor for the top five percent of the class cuts corners in his research but has escaped detection. He’s less careful about racist and sexist remarks, which you know would affect his grades if your professor knew about them. Do you bring them to your prof’s attention? After all, you aren’t lying.
- A group of stay-at-home moms begins discussing a new family in the neighborhood who are from another culture. They make some stereotypical jokes about the family and wonder why you don’t join in.

What should we do when we’re asked to participate in something morally wrong? Christians have responded in three ways to such dilemmas.

PRETENDING. The first response GIVES IN to expectations and demands that are sinful, immoral, unwise, or unlawful, either because of an uncritical acceptance of workplace values or an indifference to doing wrong. Sometimes this response is rationalized by distorting the gospel truth that we’re forgiven for the sinful things we do. The response may reflect a failure to connect personal faith to public life. For these reasons, this approach has been called “license” or “pretense” because we’re pretending (or being fooled into thinking) that what we’re doing doesn’t matter—we’ll be forgiven anyway. We fool ourselves into thinking that we aren’t sinning or grieving God if our intentions are good or if someone is forcing us to do what is wrong. But neither case allows us to sidestep the commands of Scripture and be forgiven or excused.

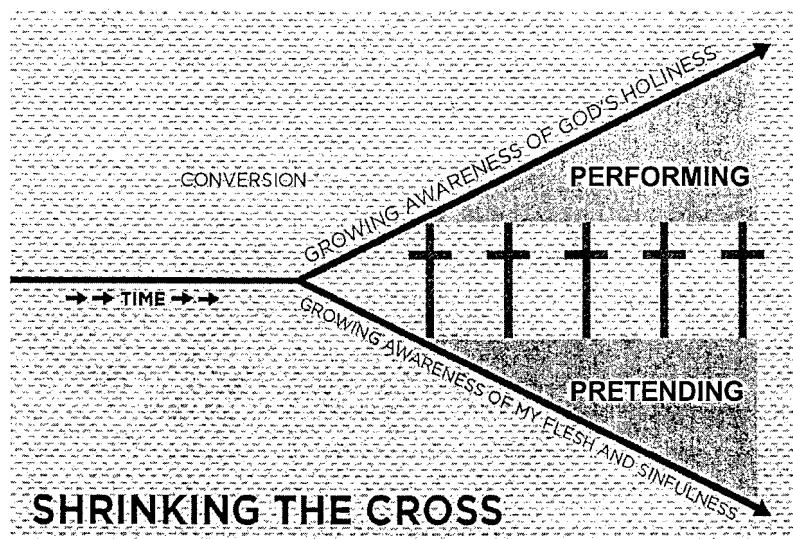
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<sup>2</sup> A pluralistic society is a culture or environment that expects its citizens or members to accept a broad set of often contradictory personal beliefs in others.

**PERFORMING.** The second set of responses centers around NOT GIVING IN to unbiblical values or demands. And while it is a good thing to uphold the commands of Scripture, sometimes it leads people to remove themselves from the problem as if it were THE test of their personal righteousness. We call this a “performance” or self-righteous approach because we wind up trying to prove our own righteousness instead of relying on Christ’s.

For example, in the case of the copyright violation, a person with this mindset would see quitting his job in protest as the *only* legitimate choice. But that leaves the situation unchanged. A new employee might be asked to do the same thing and the patterns and structure of sin in that workplace will continue. If we remove ourselves from the situation to demonstrate our own righteousness, we lose the opportunity to come alongside our coworkers to help solve the problem and positively impact the work culture.

We need to remember that our right beliefs are never the source of our goodness, and the main problem for non-Christians is not their value system, but the fact that they don’t know Christ. If neither of these previous two responses is appropriate, how should we work differently as Christians?



**A GOSPEL-CENTERED PERSPECTIVE: IN, NOT OF, THE WORLD.** A third response to the problem asks, “How can I, as a child of God, uphold God’s commands *and* meet the true needs of my workplace?” Answering that question helps us uphold biblical commands while respecting the legitimate needs of those in authority.

To understand this third way, we need to see the ways that pretense and performance are similar. Both assume we’ve been abandoned in our circumstances

and that the gospel is powerless in our situation. We thus feel compelled to rely on ourselves. We adopt an orphan mind-set, where we believe that we are alone and without resources. Instead of trusting God to give us the strength and wisdom to do what is right as his children, we turn to pretending and performing.

When the promises and power of the gospel shape our lives, we grow in our awareness of two things: (1) our awareness of God's character grows—his love, holiness, power, and presence—in ways that make us rely more on him and less on ourselves; (2) our sense of our own sinfulness grows. We see more how the fall has touched every action and thought—even motivations we thought were pure now seem affected by sin. This is not merely head knowledge, but something we experience.

God doesn't want us stuck in performance or pretense. He wants us to be people who can repent of our sins, admit our weaknesses, and work, pray, and act in reliance on him. He wants us to seek the prosperity and peace of others. As his people, God wants us to be “set apart” in the way we live for him. At the same time, he wants us to be “set among” those around us so that we do not isolate ourselves from a common life with those who do not know him (Jeremiah 29:5-6).

A gospel response to pretense and performance requires us to rely on God's promises, power, and love more deeply, since we understand that our sinful nature affects everything we do. Without a gospel perspective, we are vulnerable to the pressures of our work culture, whether as a student we are tempted to undermine a competitor, or as a stay-at-home mom we are tempted to gossip, or as an employee we are tempted to do something illegal because we (probably) won't get caught and we don't want to upset our supervisor.

*What if*, in the case of the demanding supervisor, the office-worker was willing to work overtime to rewrite the required article from scratch to make the deadline, rather than copy the specifications and pass them off as his company's work?

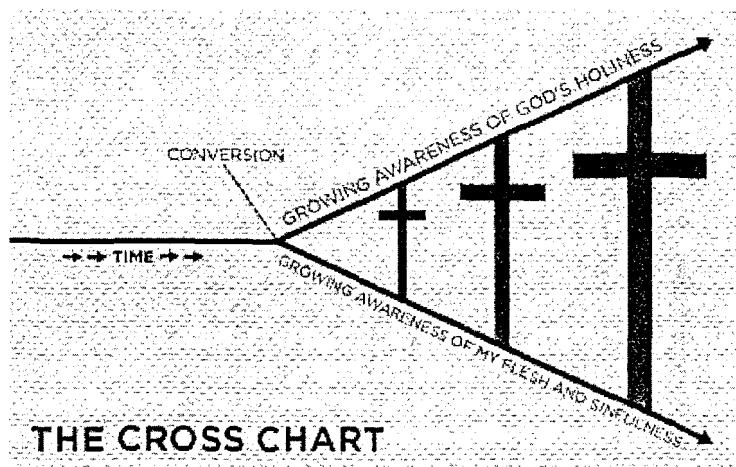
*What if* the student chose to trust God for his future and, rather than use his rival's comments to undermine him, talked with him directly about how damaging his comments were?

*What if* the stay-at-home mom had compassion on the family being gossiped about, reaching out to them and encouraging friends to do the same?

A gospel-centered perspective is a powerful alternative to the temptations and motivations associated with “pretend” and “perform.” When we perform, we rely on ourselves to look better than others; when we pretend, we give in to temptation, thinking (falsely) that we have no choice. A reliance on Jesus's power and righteousness gives us what we need to navigate these dangers in a way that

honors God and loves others. In every tension, God is working through us to change our work cultures for his glory while he is transforming us by the gospel.

Becoming more aware of our own sins and failures is no fun! It means admitting that we aren't as good as we make ourselves out to be. We need to rest in Jesus's righteousness if we are to face our own sinfulness honestly. Otherwise, our guilt, shame, and regret will turn us back to our functional idols, like making money, achieving success, and looking good, even when we know deep inside that we've failed in many ways.



Growing in our understanding of God's holiness isn't easy either. It means relying on him rather than ourselves. It means facing his displeasure over our sins and repenting for them. If we aren't resting in what Jesus has done for us, we'll end up working harder in the same old ways, trying to earn God's favor rather than relying more deeply on his grace.

In the next seven lessons we'll look at seven ways to turn from performance or pretense toward a gospel-centered perspective in our work. The gospel deepens our reliance on Christ and the power of the Spirit. We will see our need for Christ more clearly and allow God to increase the impact of the cross in our lives.

This side of heaven we will always find ourselves in need of repentance, and the repentance the Spirit works in us will lead us to rest more deeply in Christ's perfect obedience and obey him more willingly and joyfully. Christ lived the perfect life for us so we can be led by his Spirit to advance his kingdom in this world.

## EXERCISE

### PRETENDING AND PERFORMING AT WORK

At home, work, or school, we can be controlled by pretense- or performance-oriented motivations rather than a gospel-centered perspective. Sometimes the problem is our environment itself and the assumptions and expectations operating there. Sometimes the problem lies in the attitudes we bring to our work. How does it happen with you?

1. Think of a situation at work where you have been struggling.
2. Use the questions below to understand the way this situation tempts you to pretend or perform—or perhaps both at different times.
  - (a) When tempted to give in to immoral, unethical, or unwise demands placed on you?
  - (b) Do you think you have to give in because it will affect your future if you don't?
  - (c) Do you excuse your behavior because it's the fault of the person who asked you to do it and God will forgive you anyway?
  - (d) Do you overlook others' wrong behavior because you fear retaliation?
  - (e) Do you think it's not your problem if you aren't directly involved?
  - (f) Do you distance yourself from workmates when you don't want to be associated with their actions?
  - (g) Do you decide not to confront a wrong because you don't think anyone will listen?
3. What desires and fears might be motivating your choices? Circle the statements in the first and last columns of the Gospel-centered Response chart that apply to the way you are thinking and responding to your struggle at work.
4. Use the center column of the Gospel-centered Response chart below to answer this question: How does the gospel *call* me, *free* me and *empower* me to respond differently to this situation?
5. Share what you have learned with the rest of the group and pray for each other.

### PRETENSE BASED RESPONSE

Obedience doesn't matter, I'm accepted.

My motivations are pragmatic - based on the values of my work context alone.

God has left me to my own devices and abilities – faith doesn't relate to this matter or my work.

When circumstances go badly, I am angry at myself, since I believe that my decisions should lead to a comfortable life.

When others critique me, I devastated because I am so identified with my decisions and work. Any negative evaluation of my work comes at great personal cost because work is my identity.

The main purpose of my prayer life is to help me better control of my environment. Prayer only changes my heart.

My identity is based mainly on how hard or smart or craftily I work and so I look down on those I perceive as lazy, unintelligent or unwise. I both disdain and feel superior to those around me.

### GOSPEL-CENTERED RESPONSE

I'm accepted, therefore I obey.

My motivation is based on gratitude and joy for being called to where I'm placed.

I respond to God in delight and gratitude because he calls me his own and I resemble and reflect him.

When circumstances are unfavorable, I remind myself that my punishment fell on Jesus and that God allows all the circumstances in my life, so that I'll be more conformed to his character.

When criticized, I may struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a "good person." My identity is not built on my record or my work alone, but on God's love for me in the person Christ.

My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with God.

My self-view is not based on personal achievement. In Christ I'm sinful and also a beloved heir. I'm so bad off that only Jesus could die for me and so loved he gladly died in my place. As someone who is saved by grace, I don't perceive others as too different from me.

### PERFORMANCE BASED RESPONSE

I obey, therefore I'm accepted.

My motivation is to not do the wrong thing because of the potential consequences.

I respond to God in order to get things from God. He's only generous when I obey.

When circumstances go wrong, I am angry at God since I believe that anyone that makes good decisions deserves a good life.

If I face criticism, I am furious because I think of myself as a "good person" and my positions are always well thought through. Criticism threatens my value system and even the will of God.

My prayers consist largely of petition for circumstances and heat up when I am in a time of need or feel pressures in life.

My self-view centers upon my living up to my own standards or goals, when I do, I feel confident. If I don't, I feel inadequate. This makes me prone to a lack of mercy or patience towards failing people.

## REVIEW AND INTRODUCTION TO LESSONS 4-9

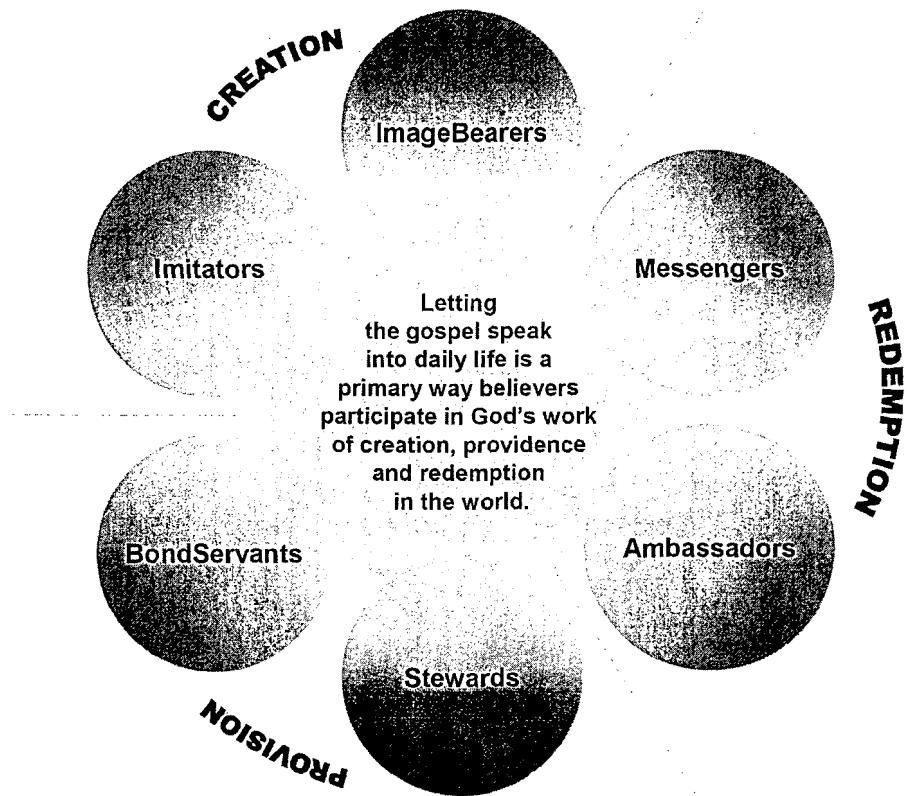
In the past three lessons, we've seen that our work is one of the major contexts through which we reflect God's character and glory to the world. We've looked at how our work changes the world, how we are changed by God through our work, and how we often get our perspective on faith and work wrong.

We now want to look at how, as believers, we can bring a gospel-centeredness to our work as we move in partnership with God. We want to examine ourselves as

1. partners in God's creative work as Image-bearers and Imitators;
2. partners in God's providence as Bond-servants and Stewards; and
3. partners in God's redemption as Ambassadors and Messengers of the gospel.

Our last lesson looks at how God partners with us and renews us in our Sabbath from work.

In the next six lessons, we'll look more deeply into each of these six aspects of our partnership with God, using the gospel as our lens and our guide.



## LESSON 4

# IMAGE-BEARERS: A GOSPEL LOOK AT THE IMAGE OF GOD

### BIG IDEA

When our eyes are opened to God's work, we participate in it just by seeing the world from a gospel perspective—being observant wherever he has placed us, ready to speak and act according to what we've come to know through faith in Jesus. Our adoption into God's household as well loved children qualifies us to walk in partnership with him. Our work—though we are tugged in so many different directions by people and institutions that want to conform us into *their* image—is nevertheless being transformed by God through our faithful gospel presence. It is no accident that God has placed you where you are. Through your presence, you reflect God's character as one of his *Image-bearers* to those around you.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passages

Article: *Image-bearers in God's Economy*

Discussion: Process concepts of *Image-bearers in God's Economy*

Exercise: *Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Opportunity*

Wrap-Up: Final thoughts and prayer

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

The gospel transforms our perspective on work. Instead of it being an idolatrous temptation or source of toil, pain, and frustration, it becomes a way to reflect God's image in daily life. When we trust in Christ, we soon see that God has been going before us to encourage and guide us as his children. By faith our hearts turn from fear to worship as we reflect his image and glorify him wherever he has placed us. The promises and power of the gospel free us to reveal God's imprint on our lives as we faithfully serve where he has called us.

### SET-UP

Because of Jesus's work in our lives, image-bearers are freed from a fear of circumstances and have new eyes to see God's work. A daily relationship of repentance and faith with our Creator, empowered by knowing that in Christ we have received his perfect life and are accepted and loved by our heavenly Father, is the foundation for a renewed perspective on our work.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 we are told that Satan has blinded the world in sin, leaving unbelievers cut off from the things of God. Spiritual blindness comes with and from idolatry and a preoccupation with the things of this world. The unspiritual worry and say, "What shall we eat?" "What shall we drink?" "What shall we wear?"

(Matthew 6:31). Their mental energy and physical strength are absorbed in their present circumstances rather than the things of God in gratitude for his provision.

In today's Bible Conversation we will look at two passages that show how God's power can free us to see our circumstances with eyes of faith and thus better reflect the restored image of God. We'll look at one Old Testament passage and one New Testament passage. These passages may be familiar, but consider what they teach us about being witnesses to God's work in history.

READ: The first story is about Elisha and his servant, who are surrounded by the Syrian army that stands ready to destroy them. Would someone read 2 Kings 6:8-23 aloud?

**LEADERS NOTE:** This can be a confusing story because the prophet Elisha is not directly named. The "Man of God" referenced here is Elisha.

ASK: What is happening here?

ASK: Why do you think Elisha's servant could not see Israel's chariots at first? What enabled Elisha's servant to see the reality around him?

ASK: Why is it important that Elisha's servant (not just Elisha) gained a different perspective on that day?

ASK: How does faith grow in our lives?

**LEADERS NOTE:** There is a tremendous importance that Elisha's servant was able to see what Elisha saw, so that it could be verified and given to us as Scripture. We need others in our lives to strengthen our faith and open our eyes to what God is doing, just like Elisha did for his servant. Sometimes we even need their prayers.

ASK: Was there ever a time when you or someone you know lacked the faith for a godly perspective on life's circumstances?

ASK: What changed you or them as you/they struggled in this manner?

READ: The second passage is Ephesians 1:15-23. These verses are one long, rich and profound sentence that spills out from Paul in worship and joy. Would someone read Ephesians 1:15-23 aloud?

ASK: Why is Paul praying for the Ephesians this way? What is his motivation?

What are some things Paul is praying would happen in the Ephesians' lives?

Take a look at the phrase “having the eyes of your hearts enlightened.”

ASK: Why is it important that the Ephesians’ hearts (and ours) are enlightened? What is the alternative? What is the source and result of their enlightenment?

ASK: How do these passages relate to being Image-bearers where God places us?

## TRANSITION TO ARTICLE

When Jesus is our Savior and the center of our lives, he changes us at a foundational level, giving us a new perspective on our life and work. Knowing God and trusting him gives us eyes of faith to see beyond our circumstances to the work God is doing all around us. God has enlisted us, as members of his family, to share in the responsibilities and opportunities of his kingdom rule. He is including us in something much bigger and more beautiful than anything we might have imagined. Let’s turn to an article that looks at the surprising characteristics of Image-bearers in God’s kingdom household.

## ARTICLE

Turn to the article ***Image-bearers in God’s Economy*** and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

## DISCUSSION

Let’s think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: What ideas from this article are new or interesting to you?

ASK: How might these ideas change your outlook on your own work or free you up to work differently?

## EXERCISE

We’ve been talking about motivations for work. Help diagnose your perspectives and motivations by working through a personal case study in ***Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Opportunity***.

TURN TO: ***Ordinary Work, Extraordinary Opportunity***. If there is time, review the exercise or assign it as homework.

## WRAP-UP

Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE: IMAGE-BEARERS IN GOD'S ECONOMY

The English word *economy* comes from a Greek word that means the “good housekeeping” or stewardship of something or someone. The picture that the Bible paints of God’s economy, or work in human history, is one of God’s deep love and care for humanity, coupled with an invitation to participate in the ongoing growth, redemption, and care of his kingdom. We enter into God’s economy or household when we receive the gospel by faith. God then invites us to become image-bearers who imitate his care for his creation as partners in his household work.

As participants in the institutions of the world that are ordained by God but also fallen (media, government, education, entertainment, households, businesses, science, etc.), we may have once operated without a knowledge of the gospel. Without Jesus, we relied on our own devices and were pressured by those same institutions to be conformed to their “image.” Each one has its own language, values, and rewards apart from (and sometimes opposed to) the purposes of God. Even now, those institutions are at odds among themselves as they seek to make all human culture subservient to their goals, aims, and values.

But the gospel has changed all that for us. Jesus, the firstborn of creation, became human to show us how to be *truly* human. He bore the truest image of both man and God for us to see. Through the victory of his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus reversed the curse of sin and death present in us and the institutions we are part of. He gives believers his life and record and makes us partners in his work. Just as the eyes of Elisha’s servant were opened to God’s work and thus to new ways of relating to his enemies, so God uses the gospel to open our eyes to new ways of relating to believers and unbelievers in our work.

Ephesians 4 says that because Jesus made us recipients of God’s grace (Christ’s righteous record) he also gave us other gracious gifts—like joy, peace, patience, and kindness—that reflect God’s image and character. Not only do we have a tremendous calling and freedom in our work, we also have all the resources we need from God to accomplish the tasks set before us. The grace of God is unleashed by faith and empowered by the Spirit to build up God’s kingdom through our work.

Let’s consider some aspects of image-bearing in our work.

### OUR WORK HAS ETERNAL PURPOSES

As human beings we’ve always borne God’s image, but now, because of Christ’s transforming work in us, the image we reflect resembles him more clearly. We are less likely to use God’s gifts selfishly, either to win his favor or for personal gain. Now a central part of our calling is to just be present *as* image-bearers who are ready to respond to what God is doing. Jesus promises to be present with us and to

work through us, so our task is to show up, pay attention to what he is doing, and apply his power and perspective to the work before us.

This principle is illustrated in the story of three stoneworkers who were building a cathedral. A stranger wandered by as the first stoneworker was transferring rocks to a pile near a wall. "What are you doing?" asked the stranger. "Can't you see that I'm carrying rocks?" he replied. The stranger asked the second worker, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm building a wall." Later, the man came upon the third mason. "What are you doing?" he asked. This worker knew whose image he reflected. "I'm building a cathedral to the glory of God!" A godly perspective on his circumstances made all the difference.

#### OUR WORK POINTS TO JESUS'S WORK

Not only do we bear God's image, but because our work flows from what Jesus has done for us, we do our best at work to honor him. We don't have to earn our righteousness or our relationship with God—that comes from Jesus. But now, as God's children, we desire to bring glory to the family name, just as Jesus did. Not only do we want to do good work, we want to work with humility. Now our goal is giving away glory rather than hoarding it for ourselves.

#### OUR WORK IS EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

Believers are promised God's indwelling power through his Spirit. We will be called into situations where we are incapable in our own strength of doing the work at hand. But Scripture says that these are the times when God displays his miraculous power in ways that others will recognize are not from us, but from him. We will have trials. Sometimes we will be put in harm's way and restored; sometimes we will be under pressure right up to our breaking point. In it all, God awaits our prayers for his kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

#### OUR IMAGE-BEARING POINTS TO THE TRUE IMAGE-BEARER

Many people who don't know Jesus do excellent work. Their motivations might be mixed, but we can praise them for it, thankful for the common grace God extends to all his creatures for his honor and their benefit. God puts us in situations where we need to work with unbelievers and share our gifts. There we can share the reason for the hope we have, as Jesus has met us in our place of need and given us new hope and perspective for our lives and our work.

This past year God placed a new friend in my life through some extraordinary circumstances. The "extraordinary" story is ordinary in the sense that God used everyday people in their daily callings to point someone to himself. My new friend had a successful business, a loving family, and outwardly seemed to be thriving. But inwardly he was disappointed; somehow life had fallen short of his expectations. One evening while playing hockey, he fell to the ice and was whisked away to the hospital with a brain aneurysm. He underwent surgery and in those moments cried out to God to spare him. God answered his prayers.

Believers who were doctors, moms, students, and friends surrounded, prayed for, and cared for this man and his family—just as Jesus asks us to love our neighbor as ourselves. These believers pointed the family to what God had done and was doing. My friend left the hospital a different man, humbled by God, eager to learn more about Jesus, who he saw in those who cared for him and his family.

The Good Samaritan is a model neighbor. As he went about his normal tasks, he encountered someone with a desperate need. He responded faithfully and unselfishly to the fact that God had put him there to meet that need. We reflect the image of God not only when we do something dramatic, but when we pay attention to what God has us doing every day, and care for others we meet in quiet, practical, selfless ways.

Since we are God's image-bearers, all of our personal circumstances can be a way to participate in God's work. Instead of using our work to earn God's favor *or* to get all we can for ourselves, the gospel frees us to reflect our heavenly Father in his creative beauty, fruitful providence, and redemptive care. As we pursue our God-given work, whatever and wherever it might be, we participate in what God is doing in the world. In the church, God is creating a huge household of men and women who reflect his image and rely on his love and power in their relationships.

Our generous God invites us to reflect him in all we do. Daily he is using us as his image-bearers—participants in the coming kingdom—to bring him glory through this new economy, where all things are being brought under his righteous rule.

## EXERCISE

### ORDINARY WORK, EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY

Most of the time our work, school, and family lives function on two levels. First, there is the immediate, surface level of following through on commitments and day-to-day issues of organizing, scheduling, producing, attending meetings, problem solving, etc. These responsibilities fill up most of our day, taking up much of our time, energy, talents, and attention. But ultimately they are all surface issues, in that they are the things easiest to navigate and the activities in which we use our natural gifts and skills.

At a second deeper level of work, lie weightier issues of attitude and perspective. Here we encounter issues that burden and bring out the worst in us. These include getting along with others, forgiving sin, communicating, thinking the best of another, developing friendships, controlling personal jealousy, and using power and authority wisely. Unless we deliberately bring these issues into the light, most remain hidden while they shape and largely control our surface issues.

Here is an example showing this deeper, second realm:

Imagine yourself in a workplace discussion on how resources (time, money, etc.) should be applied to different departmental budgets. Based on past experience, you can predict how your peers will behave this time. Joe is hard to get along with because he tends to be brash and overly assertive. Pat usually loses out in these discussions because she avoids conflict and won't fight for what she thinks is best, even when she has excellent ideas. At the meeting you support Pat's good idea, but Joe becomes defensive. Later you get an e-mail from Joe stating that he has decided not to participate in a project with you because he is "too busy."

Let's summarize what is really happening here. Similar scenarios happen almost every day in workplaces, schools, churches, homes, and community groups.

ASK: What are some surface issues in this example?

- *How budget and company resources are distributed.*
- *How decisions are made.*
- *The work-flow process.*
- *Values and expectations for the way people treat one another in the office.*

ASK: What are some of the deeper issues?

- *Joe is overly assertive. His self-worth seems to come from being right and getting his way. He keeps a record of rights and wrongs.*
- *Pat is insecure about her role within the group and undervalues her own opinion, even when it is an excellent option.*

- *The decision-making process resembles that in a dysfunctional family, rather than a rational discussion. Everyone is trying to please the boss. What is best for the group seems less important than winning.*
- *Joe is angry that he didn't get his way. He punishes you by withdrawing from a commitment. He does not consider what is best for the group or himself; he just punishes those who disagree.*

ASK: What are some gospel ways to move forward? (Think of how the image of God is or should be present in coworkers and processes.) There are things you can do one-on-one and in the group.

- *One-on-one, you can build relationships with Pat and Joe and encourage them to use the gifts God has given them. We should value ourselves (Pat) and others (Joe) as persons with dignity, made in the image of God, rather than obstacles to overcome, dominate, or win over.*
- *We should make decisions based on what is best for the group or institution, rather than ourselves (Pat needs the courage to argue; Joe needs to renounce power plays.)*
- *You can encourage your boss to change the decision-making process by giving everyone a chance to speak; voting on things as a group; and having everyone explain why they believe their vote was best for the institution.*

Now try this with a challenging situation in your own workplace.

ASK: What is the situation? Who are the people involved?

ASK: What are the surface issues?

What creates tension and challenge in the situation, and how does each person (including you) respond to those challenges? How does each person's response make the situation better or worse?

ASK: What are the deeper issues?

What fears, expectations, desires, and goals seem to shape each person's response (including yours) to the situation? How does that help you understand their surface responses?

ASK: How should you interact with the situation as an image-bearer?

How can Jesus's work and presence in your life affect your own fears, expectations, desires, and goals? How will this change the way you participate in this situation?

**ASK:** How can Jesus's desires for your coworkers help you move toward them with a desire to love, serve, and encourage them? How can you work together to do what is best for your institution?

## LESSON 5

# A NEW ATTITUDE: IMITATING GOD IN A WORLD OF WORK

### BIG IDEA

As we saw in the last lesson, God gives men and women talents that can be used to reflect his image and character. Ultimately we offer ourselves to God's service to help bring the blessings of his kingdom into this world. The gospel makes us loved sons and daughters and changes our work from something we do for personal gain to something we do as *Imitators* of God who are eager to carry out his will.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Bible Conversation: | Read and talk about the passages                       |
| Article:            | <b><i>Extreme Work: Striving and Sloth</i></b>         |
| Discussion:         | Process concepts of <b><i>Extreme Work</i></b> article |
| Exercise:           | <b><i>Life Integration Diagnostic</i></b>              |
| Wrap-Up:            | Final thoughts and prayer                              |

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Too many of us use human standards of success and failure to measure the value of our work instead of considering how our work is making us more like Jesus. We may not realize it, but we have abused the relationships, situations, and roles God has given us whenever we have used them to pursue own idolatrous goals rather than seeking to imitate God in his work. Is it because we think we have earned our roles and relationships rather than having them entrusted to us by God? Are we ignorant of how a gospel perspective helps us to pursue our work in faith? Christ's work on our behalf should keep us from being fixated on ourselves. When we identify with Jesus, we're freed up to be imitators of our creative, sustaining, and redeeming heavenly Father.

### SET-UP

Who we are should shape what we do. As image-bearers who reflect God and share in his work, we are not in our circumstances by chance. God is using us as his partners in the roles and opportunities entrusted to us. It brings him joy for us to bear his image and imitate his work. Jesus's work in our lives frees up time and effort we once spent responding to circumstances in fear and shame. His Spirit allows love to flow to others through our work.

As our salvation and new identity in Christ are worked out in our lives, we begin to see where we have God-given influence in our home and workplace. This gives us courage to step into those places of influence as imitators of God. We come to see that we were made to shape those contexts for God's glory and the advance of the gospel.

Let's look at some passages that get below the surface of our lives to deal with our motivations. In the first passage, Moses is commissioning Israel as they are about to enter the Promised Land. Though he is left behind because of his own disobedience, he reminds them of God's law and of who God is.

READ: Deuteronomy 4:1-9

ASK: What does Moses propose as the motivation for listening to God and doing what he commands (imitating God)?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** The critical answer here is that receiving the land as an inheritance reflects Israel's position as God's beloved children. The coming kingdom of God is their destiny. So the most important thing for them and us is to "cling" or "hold fast" to the Lord as the only hope against idols that lead to destruction. The land is not their hope—God is.

ASK: What are some sub-benefits listed here? Why are they important?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** The nations are watching what is happening (v. 6, "in the sight of the peoples"). What will amaze them is how near God is, as he dwells among his people, rather than far off. (He appears to his people as a pillar of smoke and cloud of fire.) Likewise their keeping of the law and imitating God will bring wisdom and understanding to all the nations.

Now, let's look at Christ's work on our behalf.

READ: Hebrews 2:9-11 and 14-18 (ESV)

ASK: What is Christ's understanding of our individual circumstances?

ASK: What are some implications of willingly walking into situations of suffering and trouble as people who follow and imitate Jesus?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** Jesus sees and honors us. He empowers our obedience and takes our failure so we can be free from guilt and shame, free to act as beloved brothers and sisters.

READ: Galatians 2:20-21 ESV

ASK: What do these verses say about how we should be motivated in daily life?

ASK: What do you think it means for us to frustrate or nullify the grace of God?

ASK: How might your lifestyle be nullifying God's grace?

ASK: How is the motivation of Galatians 2 similar to the Israelites “holding fast” or “clinging to the Lord” in Deuteronomy 4?

TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: Our imitation of God’s work can deviate toward two extremes: striving and sloth. At first these stances appear to be opposites, but when we examine their underlying causes, they become surprisingly equivalent.

When work is our master (when we’re enslaved to our work and *strive* toward it as our ultimate goal, rather than being willing imitators of God), we have exalted work to be an idol in our lives (something we value and “worship” more than God). When work is seen as drudgery to avoid because we’re bent towards laziness or leisure, we suffer from an opposite form of idolatry. Under the sway of *sloth*, the desire to “strike it rich” by manipulating the system or to “just get by” with minimal effort can be appealing. But again, there is no desire to imitate God in how and why we work. The extent to which we look to work as our salvation or our misery shows how career or leisure have become functional idols or masters.

Both extremes stem from misunderstanding the nature of work as something given by God for our good and his glory. As you read ***Extreme Work***, consider how you might be affected.

## ARTICLE

Turn to the article ***Extreme Work: Striving and Sloth*** and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

## DISCUSSION

Let’s think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: How are striving and sloth similar?

ASK: How does a hub-oriented or gospel-centered approach correct the ways we pursue our labor and its fruits?

ASK: How do striving and sloth shrink the work of the cross? (Think about ways they can represent both pretending and performing.)

Let’s make these ideas a little more personal.

ASK: Do you need to repent of any motivations you have toward your work?

## EXERCISE

In ***Extreme Work: Striving and Sloth*** we've been talking about motivations for work. Help diagnose your motivations with a personal case study in ***Life Integration Diagnostic***.

TURN TO: ***Life Integration Diagnostic***. If there is time, review the exercise with the group, or assign it for homework.

## WRAP-UP

Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

# EXTREME WORK: STRIVING AND SLOTH

As God's image-bearers and imitators, we can only co-create. Farmers don't cause plants to grow, parents don't grow children from the dust of the ground, and scientists can't speak forth a new invention from nothing. We can't work on our own; we can't do what God does. God has chosen us to work "under" him to subdue the earth, fill it, and name his creatures. Our work, at its best, points back to God as a truer, greater, and eternal reality.

Our relationship to work has been marred by the fall. We see this in our attitudes. Rather than seeing work as something God has given us, we are prone to two opposite but equivalent errors: *striving* and *sloth*. Workaholics (the strivers) and slackers (the slothful) are controlled by fear, pride, and/or unbelief—rather than seeing themselves as imitators of God. The workaholic displays unbelief as he uses his work performance to justify himself internally or outwardly toward others. Pride and fear can motivate him to seek his identity in his work: pride, in that he wants an identity that he earns; fear, in that he doubts God will give him the identity he wants. Or he may fear that God doesn't love him enough to care for him at all. The slacker demonstrates unbelief and indifference to God by failing to use God's gifts for God's glory. He may be controlled by a fear of failure so that he is afraid to try meaningful work. Or he may have a sense of proud entitlement that doesn't believe he owes anything to God or anyone else—his priority is his own comfort.

The striver works for his own reputation, security, and gain instead of God's kingdom. The slothful person works for his own comfort instead of God's glory. Both striving and sloth reveal that our perspectives on God, identity, and work need realignment. Both reveal an absence of faith and love. And because both stem from unbelief, pride, and fear, we are vulnerable to both temptations at any given time.

### STRIVING: WORK AS MASTER

Overwork places our need for comfort, control, security, and approval ahead of our relationship with God. The surface issue of overwork often flows from a deeper desire to control our circumstances instead of relying on God. This can be seen in a preoccupation with position and success as things that give us meaning and value. Our bent motivations shape our identity. Striving separates us from God's plan to make us more like Christ. God is always more concerned with our character than he is our competence, position, or productivity.

Instead of work being one part of life, we allow it to engulf things it should not. When having superior wealth, possessions, family, or reputation is an idol, our striving for more will come at a cost. It will destroy other things we value (wealth destroying family, or possessions harming reputation, etc.). When we misuse

God's gifts of time, talent, and health, God's goal is to allow them to expose our idols so that we humbly return to him.

To this point, Jesus says to those who strive:

"... do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat ... nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing. . . O you of little faith! Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:25-34)

Fear, pride, or unbelief may functionally underlie our overwork, but each one also includes our failure to trust God in our circumstances.

#### SLOTH: WORK AS A CURSE

The opposite of striving is sloth, which views work as a curse to avoid. Often there is an underlying fear or unbelief about God's willingness to help with a difficult task, so a person prefers not to try and fail. Others feel they should not be expected to work.

When people feel they are being treated unfairly or feel the burden of work, they avoid or ignore it, or put in minimal effort. Perhaps we don't view our work as something that intrinsically glorifies God; we'd rather serve ourselves with comfort or leisure. Those who struggle with sloth miss the truth that both work and leisure point to Christ's glory. That is why Paul reminds us to

Obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. (Colossians 3:22-24)

This side of heaven, we will always experience tension from life's competing priorities. As finite, fallen beings with limited time and resources, how else could we feel? The question we must ask is, when is "enough" work enough—and when is it not enough? Work gurus may talk about work-life balance, but such balance is technically impossible. Demands and circumstances change daily. We are always in flux, tempted to respond to the needs by changing our circumstances rather than understanding what God calls us to. Achieving balance can become our goal, rather than seeing balance as a gift from God that comes from dependence on him to mediate the competing demands of life.

Our lack of balance can actually go even deeper. We may not technically overwork but still be enslaved to our jobs in our need for success. We may avoid sloth outwardly without serving Christ well. We might do a good job at a task, but it may be the wrong thing overall because we failed to love. We need the truth of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit to accurately understand our circumstances.

### GOD-CENTERED WORK

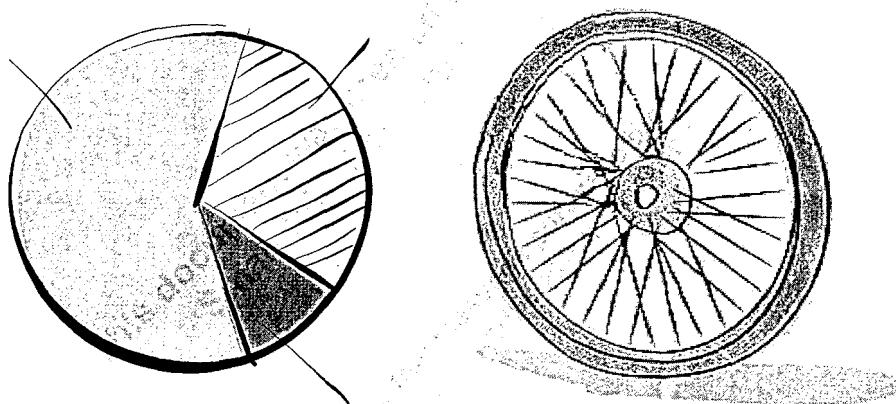
Our culture urges us to be “balanced” by compartmentalizing—allocating so many hours to work, to family, to church, to leisure, etc. But eventually conflicts arise, and when the “margin” in one category disappears, it competes for the time and energy designated for other categories, producing guilt, frustration, anger, or paralysis. And simply trying to manage life’s surface challenges differently doesn’t address the idols that can operate even when we try to be “balanced.”

Think of what happens when you encounter situations like these. Do you detect fear, pride, or unbelief in your attempts to address them?

- The boss demands that you work overtime on your spouse’s birthday.
- You’ve just had a third child, whose medical issues require hospitalization for the foreseeable future.
- You develop a medical condition that will affect your ability to do your job. Should you tell anyone at work?
- You want to move to a new area, but cannot sell your home without losing a lot of money.

The quest for a “balanced” life puts each individual piece (your job, personal life, kids, parents, God, etc.) in competition with the rest. Your separate worlds never interact, and God isn’t central to any of them. We move between different sets of expectations and values, forgetting that God created us to be whole people. Because we aren’t integrated we don’t see that God desires to change us *as we* work, or how he uses us in his kingdom *through* our work.

A more biblical solution is to think of our lives as spoked wheels with God as the hub. Everything takes its place as a spoke attached to the hub. If one spoke is detached, it may be a problem, but it is not catastrophic. God holds it all together. If one spoke can only carry a smaller load, the hub can guide the other spokes to absorb the stress. Keeping God at the center puts the events of life in proper perspective and helps us see that God uses all things to make us more like Christ. God isn’t relegated to one portion of life; he holds every part together.



To keep God as our hub, we may need to change our life patterns. At a deeper level, we may need to change what we think we “need” to do and our motivations for doing so (e.g., fear-based parenting, educational choices, keeping long work hours, meeting unspoken family expectations, etc.). How will we know we are doing the right things the right way? Friends can offer wisdom, but the ability to face the future without fear flows from trust in God as the mediator of our callings. And because God has promised answers when we seek his kingdom (Matthew 6:25-34), the answers will become clear in his time. As his children we can face the future without fear.

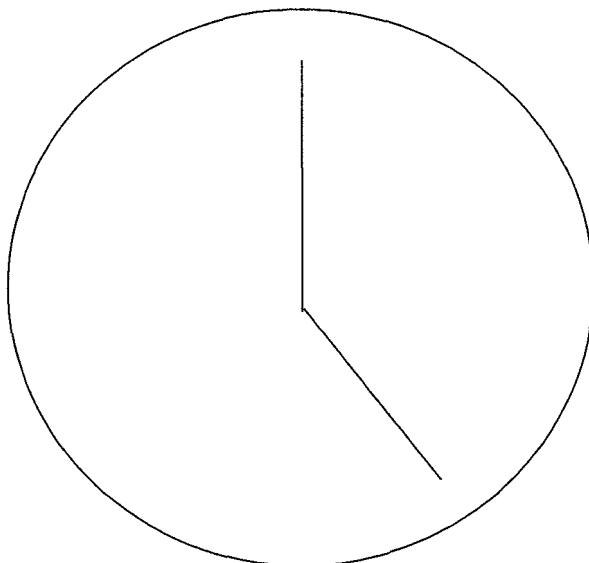
## EXERCISE

### LIFE INTEGRATION DIAGNOSTIC

Beneath our tendencies to striving and sloth are idolatries that can be dislodged by the Spirit as he exposes our hearts, leads us to truthful answers, and gives us the power to change. Ultimately we want Christ to rule our schedules, lives, motivations, and hearts.

First, list out your current life and work responsibilities as a pie chart. Then, ask yourself the following questions and discuss your answers with a trusted family member, coworker, or friend.

PIE CHART



#### QUESTION SET 1

- How do I respond if I am criticized as a way to make someone else look better?
- What is my response when someone publicly critiques my work?
- How do I feel if someone overlooks my position or qualifications?
- What happens if I am not affirmed for the hours I spend at work?
- What if someone brings my competence, success, or ability into question?
- Which of these scenarios would get the biggest emotional response from me?

Do you see any pattern to your answers?

What might that pattern or system of beliefs be telling you?

## QUESTION SET 2

- Do I waste time or “pretend” to work? How often do I do this?
- How much time do I spend pursuing get-rich-quick schemes?
- When have I complained about not being respected or valued at work?
- Am I given enough resources to do my job? Am I underpaid for my work?
- Do I feel stuck in a dead-end position or lifestyle?
- Which of these thoughts might get the biggest emotional response from me? Why?

Do you see any pattern to your answers?

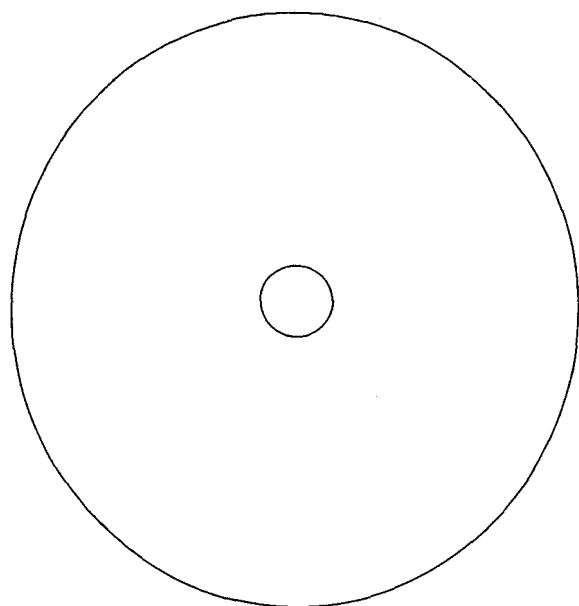
What might that pattern be telling you?

## QUESTION SET 3

- To whom (or what) am I really entrusting my time? Future? Life?
- Is there anything underlying my answers in Question Sets 1 & 2 that makes me think I don’t have options, so I have to put up with whatever situation my circumstances have placed me in?
- Am I giving my circumstances to God? Do I trust him to be the hub of my life or am I giving him just a slice or two of my life’s “pie”?
- What is more important to me: pleasing God with my work or pleasing people? Why is that?
- Do I trust God enough to let him disrupt my life if it enables me to know him more, serve others better, or honor those I love?

Finally redraw your life responsibilities below as a spoked chart—with Jesus at the hub. Ask him in prayer to become more of the hub this week.

## SPOKED CHART



# LESSON 6

## BOND-SERVANTS: FROM SLAVES TO SONS

### BIG IDEA

Some of us have been freed from a love of money, others from self-righteousness or self-importance, and others from self-hatred. We are all new people who owe our lives to Jesus. As we grow in our understanding of the gospel, we grow in gratitude and want to follow and worship the One who has given us new life! God doesn't treat us as workers, valued only for what we do, but as his sons and daughters, loved for who we are in Christ. What we do never defines who we are; our relationship to Jesus matters far more. Rather than our work being our identity, Jesus offers us true personhood as trusted sons and daughters in God's family.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Bible Conversation: | Read and talk about the passages                             |
| Article:            | <b><i>The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work</i></b>         |
| Discussion:         | Process <b><i>The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work</i></b> |
| Exercise:           | <b><i>From Work Expectations to Love Commands</i></b>        |
| Wrap Up:            | Final thoughts and prayer                                    |

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Throughout the New Testament, Christ's followers refer to themselves as *Bond-servants*— those who live under Christ's authority and desire to serve and represent him in all they do. Just as we do in marriage, bond-servants choose voluntarily to integrate their identity with the identity of someone else, for better or worse. Peter calls himself a bond-servant of Jesus Christ in 2 Peter 1:1; Paul says the same in Romans 1:1, James in James 1:1, Jude in Jude 1, and finally John in Revelation 1:1.<sup>3</sup> These men all start their letters with a declaration of their bond-service to Jesus, which should make us wonder what the idea meant to them and how it can impact us.

### SET-UP

Christ's bond-servants serve him not because they must, but because it is their desire. In ancient times, bond-servants were people who were trapped in circumstances that cost them their freedom. Because they were in debt, they had to sell themselves to a master for a period of time and use the money to pay off what they owed. They then served their master until they had worked off their debt to him. But sometimes the servant did not want to be set free; he preferred to continue serving his master, making the arrangement permanent.

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<sup>3</sup> Note: Modern translations like NIV and ESV translate *doulos* as **servant** throughout, for fear of misunderstanding and negative associations with the term "bond-servant." "Bond-servant" is a more precise translation of the original text, which we'll delve into more deeply in this lesson.

Those who had been mistreated would not choose to become bond-servants, however those who could say, "I love my master . . . I will not go out free" (Exodus 21:5), could stay on to work as servants out of gratitude and trust. Like them, believers belong to Christ, who paid the debt of our sin and freed us from spiritual bondage. We owe our lives and freedom to Christ, and we choose to serve him as bond-servants forever. We know there is no better life apart from Christ. As his bond-servants, our work contributes to his work of bringing redemption and liberation to his world.

Let's look at two passages that deal with moving from slavery to freedom in Christ. We'll start with the parable of the talents. This might seem like an odd place to start, but we want to examine it as a negative example, to think about the motivations of the unfaithful servant.

**READ:** Matthew 25:14-30. Keep in mind that a talent was roughly equivalent to a lifetime's wages for an average worker.

**ASK:** Is there a reason given why the servants were entrusted with different quantities?

**ASK:** In a gospel context, what kind of ability (v. 15) do you think God uses to measure us?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** Don't spend a lot of time trying to define *ability* or talent here. There are two important things to note from the passage as it relates to the two questions. (1) The master does not treat his servants equally, and (2) those who were praised for their ability to invest their resources were told, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Their ability or seems correlated to their capacity or *cap-ability* to serve the master faithfully in the tasks given them. The master doesn't expect their faithfulness to exceed the resources he has given them.

**ASK:** What is the stated reason that the last servant hid his talents rather than investing what he had been given to develop the master's interests?

**ASK:** Do you think the last servant knew and understood the master?  
(Hint: Was he grateful for what he'd been given and did he risk it?)

Now let's turn to one of the Apostle Paul's statements on his status as a bond-servant and its relation to the gospel.

**READ:** Galatians 1:9-12

**ASK:** What does Paul seek as a bond-servant? What doesn't he seek?

ASK: What is Paul's attitude toward those who proclaim the need to serve God out of fear, to try to earn his approval? What is his attitude toward those who please men out of fear, in an attempt to win their approval? How are the two related?

LEADER'S NOTE: Those who serve out of a fear of man or who try to earn God's approval are putting themselves under a curse. Both are impossible tasks that lead to destruction rather than salvation. The only real path Paul sees is serving Christ in gratitude for what he's done.

ASK: What is Paul's stated attitude in all he does?

TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: We want to think more deeply about the implications of serving Christ in gratitude by reading ***The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work.***

#### ARTICLE

Turn to the article ***The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work*** and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

#### DISCUSSION

Let's think about some of the main ideas from the article.

ASK: How is gratitude for God's generosity different as a motivation from personal guilt or a desire to earn a righteous position before God?

ASK: Has the Holy Spirit ever prompted you to do more than the minimum with a coworker, client or peer, when the minimum was what was expected? What did that extravagant action look like?

ASK: How might God be prompting you to consider going above and beyond what is required of you in a relationship or circumstance?

#### EXERCISE

In ***The Freedom of Serving God in Our Work*** we've been talking about motivations for work. Help diagnose your motivations by working through your personal reflections in ***From Work Expectations to Love Commands.***

TURN TO: ***From Work Expectations to Love Commands.*** If there is time, review the exercise with the group. Otherwise, assign for homework.

#### WRAP-UP

Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

### THE FREEDOM OF SERVING GOD IN OUR WORK

The gospel frees us to not just “do the right thing” in our work, but also to genuinely love God and others. Even when we disagree with coworkers or know that what they are doing is wrong, we are still called to love them. Living with God at the center of our lives means that we aim at more than following a code of conduct; God wants us to reflect his character and love for others *while* we stand up for what is right.

How hard is that balancing act? It’s impossible unless we are relying on God. We need to ask him for a grasp of his promises and power that overshadows our idols, fear of people, or the motivations and values of our workplaces. This will lead us to examine our hearts with questions like these:

- Where do I doubt that God is my true master at work and that he will take care of me? How is he calling me to be more open and loving with others instead of protecting my reputation or buckling under work pressures?
- Where do I struggle to believe that Jesus is enough for me? How do I need his help to resist the pressures of the crowd, even if it involves a loss of reputation or security? What price am I willing to pay for Christ to be seen in me? What is God calling me to in my current circumstances?
- In what ways do I try to look better than others? Am I too preoccupied with following the rules? Do I look down on others who don’t get it right? What does that reveal about my reliance on the righteousness of Christ?
- How do I need to trust Jesus in hard work situations? Do I trust him enough to let him transform me? We enter into Jesus’s rest by trusting him, not ourselves. Then we receive the rest and freedom promised in the gospel.

God loved us when we were his enemies, and Jesus’s work frees us from sin’s power and changes us. Christ gives us the power to love all that he is—his truth, honesty, integrity, and goodness—and to become like him. He enables us to love others, seek their benefit, and even bless our enemies.

God’s generosity toward us allows us to give more than what is required of us—to respond above and beyond in generosity toward others. To think more deeply about God’s generosity to us, let’s look at the origins of biblical servanthood in Deuteronomy 15:15-17 (NIV). This is the basis for understanding its fuller meaning in the New Testament.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today.

But if your servant says to you, "I do not want to leave you," because he loves you and your family and is well off with you, then take an awl and push it through his ear lobe into the door, and he will become your servant for life. Do the same for your maidservant.

The bond-servant allowed his master to pierce his earlobe with an awl (a small, pointed tool) against the door of the house. That's a very clear statement: by the power of blood you're permanently attached to this household and this master. As a mark of this bond, it was the custom to put in a gold earring after the awl was removed. With a simple voluntary act, the servant would be swearing by his own life-blood to never be free again (nor could he ever be sold).

These servants were no longer serving to pay a debt; rather, they desired to be members of the master's household who would be permanently cared for. As trusted parts of the household, these employees would usually be given stewardship over more of their master's affairs than typical servants. Although still servants, they were treated more like members of the family and given greater freedom, status, and responsibility.

The desire to become part of the master's household flowed from a love and understanding of the master's generosity. The freed man or woman who became a bond-servant experienced something so positive in the relationship that he or she was willing to put him- or herself at risk. When we experience true freedom in the gospel, our natural response is gratitude and a desire to serve the Master who pays our debts, puts his resources at our disposal, and gives us his family name.

As children who bear our Father's image and experience his acceptance, we should be even more compelled to serve others in God's household. Galatians 5:13 says that because of the gospel, we have new freedom in Christ, and we should use it as servants bound together in love. The gratitude for our freedom should compel us to become "enslaved" again, this time to be captured by our love for one another!

- At the cross we are truly accepted. We approach God as friends and sons, not as enemies. At the cross we are truly forgiven, for Christ paid the debt we could never pay ourselves. At the cross, we are made truly righteous; in exchange for our sin, Christ has given us his righteousness.
- Because we are loved as children and given the resources of our Father's household, we're free to pursue the things God loves, imitating him with honesty, justice, integrity, compassion, and generosity. Work flows from a grateful understanding of God's work on our behalf, leading us to love God by obeying his commands and working out his will.

- As bond-servants we treat the commands of our Master differently. His commands in Scripture are now our good guide. As we depend on the Spirit, our Father's commands show us how to live in love and true freedom. Becoming like Christ is not merely about sinning less, but about responding to God's grace to love others more.
- The gospel opens up the reality of life in the Spirit. Because the demands of the law have been met in Christ, we don't need to fear that God will reject us. Instead we are freed to use the abilities God has given us. Freedom, rather than guilt or duty, characterizes our daily lives.

In Mark 12:44 we see what it looks like to respond to God wholeheartedly. The poor widow completely trusts her Master to provide for her needs. Instead of giving a tenth of her income as commanded in Scripture, she gives all she has, because she knows her Master is also her Father, who can and will take care of her. In Acts 4:36-37, Barnabas sold his property and gave the proceeds to the church. What compelled such extravagant action?

Finally, consider Paul, who in 1 Corinthians 9 lists the rights he has given up to share the gospel with the Corinthians without charge. Paul argued that he had a right to be paid, but was under the Spirit's compulsion not to be. All believers should want to live with such passion and gratitude for Christ! We must rely on the Spirit to love as the whole law requires. When our words and actions are motivated by a passion for God, we find true joy and life.

All of us have seen wrongs plotted, displayed, and exalted. The Spirit will certainly lead us to avoid participating in those wrongs (and to repent of any we have committed). God's commands show us what he expects, but they are powerless to actually produce that obedience in us. The Spirit empowers our obedience, often asking us to step out in faith to go beyond what others would expect of us.

- An accountant who is asked to "cook" the books needs to do the right thing before God and care for others, which means putting himself at risk to speak the truth, protest the wrong, and refuse to cooperate for the sake of his coworkers and customers.
- The prosecutor who might naturally press for the maximum penalty so that he is seen as being tough on crime is confronted with a penitent defendant and realizes that mercy may also at times be required.
- The stay-at-home mom who is pressured to shun a mom whose children are out of control risks being shunned herself if she does the right thing by befriending the family.

- A student who is thinking of switching majors realizes that her career motivations are completely self-focused. She wonders if she should do something financially riskier that would require her to be more dependent on God.

What does our gratitude for Christ's love and our freedoms compel us to do? What do the commands of Scripture say you should *not* do, and what does the Spirit show you that love demands? Perhaps your dilemma involves a business deal, advertising campaign, or accounting practice; perhaps it involves how your children are treating a friend or an enemy. You may be aware of a fellow student who is cheating on exams under parental pressure to get good grades.

Whatever it is, the Spirit may be prodding you to do more than live for yourself and your own desires to be right, to be vindicated, or even to not get into trouble. The Spirit does not just teach our consciences right from wrong; he shows us how to rely on his power so that he can use us to create, change, redeem, and restore our broken world.

## EXERCISE FROM WORK EXPECTATIONS TO LOVE COMMANDS

At work we can often be more concerned about staying out of trouble than about going beyond work expectations to love people as we've been loved by God. This exercise can help you move beyond pretending and performing to begin responding to relationships and circumstances with love. Perhaps the challenges of your workplace resemble the challenges of these examples:

- A stay-at-home mom might focus on a child's outward behavior rather than her heart attitude or disposition. A tired father might focus on enjoying himself, not making waves at home or with siblings, parents, and neighbors.
- Students might be focused on getting good grades at the expense of truly knowing a subject or topic. This might tempt them to cheat, cut corners, or over-prepare in fear rather than to focus on knowledge and its application.
- A salesman may focus his energy on trashing his competition with innuendo and gossip rather than communicating honestly about the strengths and limitations of his company's products or services.

The challenges faced by these people—and perhaps you—are to move beyond the basics of "work expectations" to a willingness to love as Christ has loved us.

Think of your own example here and ask yourself:

- What are the expectations placed on me in my work environment?
- How am I called to love God and others better in my specific circumstances?

In the coming week, reflect daily on how you looked at the issues and circumstances, using the chart below. To begin, move from column 1 to column 2 to column 3 and ask yourself, What if my expectations for my day changed so that my number-one job was to love God and the people around me in this particular circumstance (vs. just doing the basics of my job)? What would be different?

| Situation   | What my job expects  | What a love for God and others might require beyond what my job expects  |
|---|--|--|
| <b>Example</b><br>A teammate, family member or close friend makes a mistake | <p><b>Possible Responses</b></p> <p>I help the company succeed, so I might address the situation but also cover it up.</p> <p>I make my opinion known first to my teammate and then my boss if needed (to shade things so I look best).</p> <p>I come up with the best way to fix mistakes (and highlight my own abilities).</p> | <p><b>Possible Responses</b></p> <p>I speak up, knowing I'm also prone to make mistakes yet God still loves me.</p> <p>I work with my teammate to help him as opposed to scoring points.</p> <p>I'm concerned about how a mistake could harm customers or someone else; I don't just fix it to move on.</p> <p>When tempted to judge a teammate's negligence, I remember that Christ has established my record and does not shame me or judge my competency.</p> |
| Situation   | What my job expects  | What a love for God and others might require beyond what my job expects  |

# LESSON 7

## STEWARDS: SERVING JESUS BY SERVING OTHERS

### BIG IDEA

Every opportunity that enters our lives is given by God. He wants us to represent him in ways that bring him glory and impact others with good works and the gospel. The Greek word for *Steward* is closely tied to the idea of being an agent—someone who is given resources and opportunities to carry out someone else's mission and purposes. Today, this idea lies behind the work of real estate agents, insurance agents, and secret agents. These modern stewards are equipped to act within a specific context to promote the interests of a known other.

We respond to the circumstances God gives us in ways that either conform to God's will or are opposed to it. God's provision for us as his children transforms our orphan attitudes about resources like time and money to uncover ways to seek the good of others with everything he has entrusted to us, in service to our Savior.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Bible Conversation: | Read and talk about the passages                      |
| Article:            | <i>Two Aspects of Stewardship</i>                     |
| Discussion:         | Process concepts of <i>Two Aspects of Stewardship</i> |
| Home Exercise:      | <i>My Agenda, God's Agenda</i>                        |
| Wrap Up:            | Final thoughts and prayer                             |

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

One underlying attitude of consumerism is to value people only for what they do or contribute to society. For all the benefits that come from a perspective of personal responsibility and freedom, such a system also creates a world of pride and shame in our workplaces, homes, neighborhoods, and schools. It exerts a tremendous pressure to perform because we're rewarded according to our next success or failure. Participants in such a system cut corners to win at all costs and use others for personal advantage. When we rely on our accomplishments instead of Christ, we worship ourselves and rarely share credit, overcome jealousy, or put the needs of others ahead of our own. Believers who live this way are buying into a form of self-righteousness to their peril. Such a motivational system can completely cut us off from the biblical reality of who we are as created persons with eternal souls.

### SET UP

Our identity as God's beloved children means that we are to look to him for our provision, trust him with our future, and ask him to guide our daily actions. Being identified as God's beloved frees us to put the needs of others before our own and

to celebrate their strengths and accomplishments because we know we will always be taken care of by our heavenly Father. Who we are is tied to Christ's righteousness and provision, rather than our own merit or personal performance. Gratitude for God's love and Christ's work on our behalf is the motivating force for our work.

Let's look at two passages that consider the idea of being a servant in the kingdom of God, one from Jesus and one from Paul. The first highlights a teaching from Jesus that follows a discussion on who should be the greatest leader in the coming kingdom.

READ: John 12:23-28

**LEADER'S NOTE:** The critical thing to note in this John 12 passage is that we need to die to ourselves and embrace the mission of Jesus to truly be fruitful in this world.

ASK: Jesus starts his teaching on glory and servanthood by saying that a seed needs to die to be fruitful. What does this have to do with serving and glory?

ASK: Jesus says that his Father will honor the one who serves him. What do you think that means for us as believers? What kind of honor is Jesus talking about?

ASK: Jesus says he has a choice between being saved from this hour and glorifying the name of the Father. Why are these opposites for him?

ASK: How is this concept true for us as we serve others in ways that glorify God?

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:4-11

**LEADER'S NOTE:** Don't get wrapped up in Paul's and Apollos's roles here. Paul is explaining that their work was built on Christ's work, and that is what ultimately makes the difference. We all work alongside God and do not need to compete with one another for credit or for the fields in which we labor.

ASK: What does "neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything" mean?

ASK: Similarly, what does it mean that "he who plants and he who waters are one"?

ASK: How are we all God's fellow workers?

ASK: How is the work of Jesus our foundation?

## TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: *Two Aspects of Stewardship*

In Mark 7:31 Jesus returns to Decapolis, where he previously had cast out evil spirits from a possessed man and sent them into a herd of pigs, which then plunged over a cliff. Jesus urged the healed man to return to his household. This time Jesus was warmly welcomed (compared to the first time, when he was run off by an angry mob). We don't know what happened between the two visits, but we can assume that the demoniac—now visibly and radically changed to be in his right mind, restored to a normal daily life—was one thing that probably made a difference. Instead of Jesus encouraging this man to leave the familiar to follow him, Jesus told him to stay and be transformed where he was.

In the next article, we'll see how our gratitude for Christ's work is a necessary precursor to being used as servants who display his glory—stewards in the kingdom of God representing Christ and his work on our behalf.

## ARTICLE

Turn to *Two Aspects of Stewardship* and read aloud, taking turns at breaks.

## DISCUSSION

ASK: How are the visible qualities of a transformed life a catalyst for God's glory?

ASK: How is it true that we must be united to Christ as bond-servants before we can grow into the role of stewards in his kingdom?

ASK: What are some ways that your daily life is "a chief laboratory of the gospel"?

ASK: Do you agree that, as stewards, joy is only possible when we willingly submit to Jesus serving us with his grace? Why is this so hard for us?

## EXERCISE

We are often motivated to serve ourselves—rather than God—in the activities of our day. *My Agenda, God's Agenda* considers how our daily activities can connect to ways God may be serving us—or wanting to serve the world through us. Use this exercise to see how God might be using you and desiring to change you through your daily circumstances.

TURN TO: Turn to the exercise *My Agenda, God's Agenda*. Review with the group if there is time. Otherwise assign for homework.

## WRAP-UP

Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

### TWO ASPECTS OF STEWARDSHIP

The gospel changes our outlook to help us serve others as Jesus has served us. We do this for God's glory and for others. We can love and serve others unconditionally because we've been loved and served that way ourselves. We work out of gratitude for Jesus and his love, but more than that, Jesus says that we serve and care for him when we serve others in his name (Matthew 10:42, Mark 9:41).

There are many implications to this spiritual reality. In a gospel-centered community, businesspeople compete knowing that other suppliers are not the enemy and customers are not pawns for personal gain. Advertisers make claims about products in the context of honest relationships with consumers. Housewives love their families despite trying circumstances. Students acknowledge exams as legitimate judges of what they know, and trust God for their success. This serving out of a knowledge and trust of God is what the New Testament calls being a *diakonos*, or steward. Stewards carry out the will of an authority, who has a vision for a long-term plan of action. Our actions are not our own as stewards; they are submitted to the Lord to bring about his purposes in history.

At age twenty, Wendy Clark started Carpe Diem Cleaners. Initially her goal as a Christian businessperson was to earn profits that would go to cross-cultural missions. Several years into her career, Jesus helped her to see that her business *itself* was a ministry, a service to God and her community. Now she goes to work knowing that she is serving God, not only by giving money away, but by serving her clients and employees. This has radically changed her business, particularly her focus on her employees, mostly Latino moms. Wendy offers them flexible work schedules that respect their callings as wives and moms.

Carpe Diem's hours accommodate their schedules "so that they aren't stressed out trying to get their kids to school, running late to work, and getting home on time." She changed the format of her service education events by taking the women—and their kids—to a family camp in the country. That way she gets everyone's full attention while the families get a vacation they probably wouldn't have had otherwise. She serves not just her employees, but their whole households.<sup>4</sup>

The gospel enables us to repent from seeing ourselves as orphans—as those who are abandoned and without resources—so that we can look beyond ourselves and see others as God has made them. When we rest in our status as God's beloved children we flourish, and the communities where God has placed us are impacted by our service. The gospel helps us repent of the self-centeredness that might have taken the

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Amy Sherman, <http://www.crosswalk.com/family/career/vocational-stewardship-for-the-common-good.html> and [www.carpediemcleaning.com/mission-vision/](http://www.carpediemcleaning.com/mission-vision/).

resources entrusted to us and used them for ourselves. Instead, we invest our time, energy, and relationships for the sake of the kingdom.

In Colossians 4:7, Paul calls Tychicus both a faithful steward (*diakonos*) and bond-servant (*doulos*). Here is the connection: bond-servants love God with their heart, soul, mind, and strength. All the love they have come to know is returned to God in worship and in service to others. Our relationship to and reliance on Jesus is a prerequisite for serving neighbors in his name. “Bond-service” is the Godward component, based on the Father’s love for us. It fuels the neighborly “stewardship” component, which is our service for God toward others.

Our union with Jesus is foundational for serving our neighbors. He must oversee and empower our stewardship and also be the reason we serve. When we love our neighbors, our service is transformed into worship in gratitude for all Christ has done. Just as we see in the story of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) and in Colossians 3:22-24, Jesus is the ultimate recipient of our work, which is a great spiritual encouragement if our desire is to glorify him.

There are two ways our stewardship is reflected in relationships to neighbors.

#### STEWARDS ARE SENT INTO DAILY LIFE AS GOD’S AGENTS

God has placed us where we live, like the man Jesus healed in Mark 7, to be his hands and feet, his eyewitnesses, and his voice. We are to be salt and light in the world, to preserve its good and expose its evil so people can repent and turn to Christ. As stewards, we dedicate our work to the love of neighbor and the advancement of God’s kingdom.

Don Flow, CEO of Flow Motor Corporation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, desired to honor God in his business. This led him to sell cars at a fixed price and to focus on service and long-term relationships with his customers.

“Doing what I am doing was as natural for me as a pastor being called to preach in the pulpit,” Don says. “Loving that person that walks beside you is just an abstraction—I knew lots of Christians who talked about love all the time and they were horrible to work with. This is like a complete anomaly.

“I have this passion to make it real in practice—I’m not talking about preaching to those who work for me, to customers or others. I’m not talking about favoring Christians who work here. I want to respect and value all people, regardless of their beliefs. But I am talking about living out the implications of what I believe. This is reflected in how we treat people, what our practices are, and what we think is important.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <http://ethix.org/2004/04/01/ethics-at-flow-automotive>.

## STEWARDS ARE SENT BY GOD TO OUR NEIGHBORS

As we love our neighbors, eventually they may see that God is caring for them through us. When we share the gospel verbally, they may come to know Jesus's love and respond in faith. Stewards recognize that there are no ordinary people; all bear the image of God. God gives us all we have to glorify him by loving our neighbors and bringing the gospel to bear on their lives.

"I really owe so much of the health of this business to my coworker and COO Jill Evans," said Trupoint President Matt Lievens at a breakfast meeting. "I used to go about my day making decisions in response to events and situations, rarely thinking about the people involved. But Jill regularly asks us to look at things from another perspective—to 'see' people in their unique circumstances. She quietly asks, 'I wonder what must be happening over at their shop for them to be responding to us like this? What chaos must be causing them to tyrannize us?' in response to some emergency.

"The light goes on for just a few minutes and we think about their boss, or the pressure they have after some business failure. It often softens us and causes us to be gentler as we enter conflict or some difficult negotiation. In seeing people, Jill tries to 'see' the desires that motivate them. 'What do they want?' Jill would say. We talk about their futures and ask, 'Who they could be? What are they good at?' We try to see how they might be trapped by their fears. She has introduced a whole new world of thinking about people. I am deeply indebted to her. In helping us see ourselves as servants of those around us, she has changed our whole model of business."

Some people seek ways to publicly serve God, but if we take the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46) seriously, the indirect and hidden ways of serving others are truly Christian work. We may be very surprised on the last day as we see God honor the small things done with great love, hidden from the world's eyes, but performed faithfully in response to Jesus. Jesus wants to meet us in our work in ways we cannot anticipate. He meets us in the people around us to accomplish his purposes in our lives and theirs. Asking for the knowledge of his presence and discernment of our circumstances is critical to living faithfully each day.

Interruptions from difficult and unlovable coworkers, bosses, clients, students, patients, children, and relatives give us a chance to practice repentance and faith. When we are given grace to see our orphan self-centeredness, the Spirit gives us grace to repent and step out in faith, to love as God has loved us. The irritations and stressors we once avoided or overcame in the least painful way now become opportunities to serve Christ and repent of sin. The relationships of our workplace are one of the "chief laboratories of the gospel" where God is glorified as we are refined and transformed.

## EXERCISE

### MY AGENDA, GOD'S AGENDA

This exercise builds on the previous lesson's exercise. *From Work Expectations to Love Commands* encouraged you to look back on your day and reflect on the motivations you had amid the chaos of daily life. This time we would like you to *anticipate* and ask God to show you what he might have in store for you each day.

Start by writing a "To-Do" list at the beginning of each day. Review that list in the evening and write down what God *actually* had for you that day.

In addition, create a "Done-For" list of the ways God worked through others to serve you as his beloved child.

Repeat the exercise by writing a new list each day.

Every morning use your list to turn your priorities over to God. Each evening think about how your "To-Do" and "Done-For" lists lead you to a changed perspective and growth in gratitude during the course of the week.

ASK: What did God do within my heart, soul, and mind as the week progressed?  
ASK: What do these lists reveal about my thoughts about stewardship? How can God use the opportunities in my life to grow me in service to others? What are some specific changes I now know I can make?  
ASK: How do your "To-Do" and "Done-For" lists reveal how you think about your week and God's purposes for you?

#### TO DO

*Example: Please help me in my attitude toward my coworker Jamie. He can push my buttons with his self-centeredness and whining. Help me not to lose my patience with him again.*

| TO DO | DONE FOR |
|-------|----------|
| Date  | Date     |
| Date  | Date     |

|      |      |
|------|------|
| Date | Date |
| Date | Date |

### **DONE FOR**

*Example: Father, thanks for helping me see Jamie in a new way today. Because you prompted me to ask a few questions, I was able to really listen when he talked about his wife's chronic illness and his college son's poor life choices. That really helps me see him as a fellow struggler, instead of an annoyance. Forgive me for my lack of love, and help me to know how to love him better.*

# LESSON 8

## AMBASSADORS: REPRESENTATIVES SENT BY GOD

### BIG IDEA

We are people who were once separated from God; now we represent him as we go to others with the good news of Jesus. Because we've been loved so well, as we go, we put aside our own goals and embrace our calling to extend God's kingdom, resting in God's provision, authority, and power. When we view life and work through gospel lenses, we see our neighbors as God sees them—broken people who need Jesus as much as we do.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Bible Conversation: | Read and talk about the passages                |
| Article:            | <i>Becoming Ambassadors</i>                     |
| Discussion:         | Process concepts of <i>Becoming Ambassadors</i> |
| Exercise:           | <i>People of Peace and Hospitality</i>          |
| Wrap-Up:            | Final thoughts and prayer                       |

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

As those who have trusted in Christ, God is changing us right where we are so we can bring him glory as his *Ambassadors*. He sends us into circumstances, places, and relationships where he wants to be made known. Second Corinthians 5 says that we are Christ's ambassadors, and that God makes his appeal to others through our words and actions. By our presence we seek to persuade those around us to be reconciled to God. We begin by being in relationship with them, and Jesus promises to show up in the midst of that relationship. The New Testament word translated "ambassador" is *presbeuomen*. This word, along with similar words like "elder" and "(de)legate," assumes that we are God's representatives, acting on behalf of God and his people rather than looking to our own interests.

### SET-UP

One of the blessings of life is the opportunity to play a part in reconciling people to God. God has entrusted us with opportunities for service and a message of reconciliation. To use both gifts well, we need the gift of repentance so that we see our own need of the gospel each day. How does the way God has loved me affect my view of others' circumstances? How does God view those around me? What is their greatest need, and how can I love them as I've been loved?

Let's look at a few passages that describe our role as ambassadors. We'll consider how shedding our tendency towards competitiveness and judgment changes us into people of peace and hospitality. We'll look at Jesus sending out the seventy-two and then see what Paul says about living as reconcilers as he modeled ambassadorship in the marketplace at Corinth.

READ: Luke 10:1-11

ASK: What characterizes this sending of new disciples by Jesus? Why do you think he tells them not to take supplies for their journey?

ASK: What two things does Jesus tell his disciples to say to those who welcomed them? How are these two things significant?

LEADER'S NOTE: Jesus wanted the disciples to rely on their heavenly Father in all things and to look for people who were open to the gospel and hospitable to strangers. As they got to know these men and women in their homes, these households of hospitality would provide a "home away from home" for future travels as the disciples journeyed with Jesus.

ASK: Are the disciples held responsible for the responses they receive from those they meet? Why is this important?

LEADER'S NOTE: God only holds the disciples responsible for their own faithfulness, living in openness to God's provision in all circumstances.

We have seen how Jesus prepared his disciples for future journeys to different cities and towns throughout Judea. Now, let's see what Paul the tentmaker says about ambassadorship in the kingdom of God.

READ: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

ASK: Is reconciliation an absence of conflict or something more?  
What reconciliation have we received?

LEADER'S NOTE: Reconciliation is not just the absence of conflict; it includes the presence of deep relationship and trust, and more importantly the resolution of conflict. When we reconcile we restore something that previously existed but was broken.

ASK: How does trusting in God qualify us to be gospel-centered reconcilers?

LEADER'S NOTE: The gospel has helped us die to ourselves so that we can live and speak for Christ. Just as we are no longer viewed with judgment, so we can view others with a gospel perspective of who they are in Christ.

ASK: Verse 16 says that we no longer have a "fleshly" or earthly perspective on anyone. In what ways does this reality change how we interact with people?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** We need to help people embrace their new status in Christ and never treat them according to the flesh or allow them to be defined by their past. We need to welcome and not condemn those who desire the freedom of Christ over and above the curse of sin and death. We need to call others to participate in the new creation of which we're now a part.

**ASK:** Verse 19 says that in Christ God is doing two things: (1) reconciling the world to himself, and (2) entrusting us with the message of reconciliation. What is the "message of reconciliation" entrusted to us?

**TRANSITION TO ARTICLE:** Turn to the article ***Becoming Ambassadors*** and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

## DISCUSSION

**ASK:** Do you think it is important to spend time cultivating relationships with both believers and unbelievers?

**ASK:** Are there ways that comparing yourself with others (either competing with them or looking down on them) prevents you from real friendships and authentic living?

**ASK:** What are some situations you encounter through the week where you might be tempted to be competitive and/or defensive?

**ASK:** How might knowing God's acceptance help when you are tempted to judge or be competitive with others?

**ASK:** What are some simple but significant ways to bless those you spend time with at work, home, or school? What specific actions could you undertake to build others up, rather than compete with them or tear them down?

## EXERCISE

We are thinking about our motivations and resources for sharing our faith with the people God puts in our lives. ***People of Peace and Hospitality*** helps us assess the ways pride or shame can keep us from sharing our faith with others.

**TURN TO: *People of Peace and Hospitality*.** Review the exercise with the group if there is time. Otherwise assign for homework.

## WRAP-UP

Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

### BECOMING AMBASSADORS

The story of Jonah is one of the Bible's best examples of someone called by God to go to others radically different from himself. When God called Jonah, a prophet in Israel, to preach repentance to Israel's enemies, Jonah wasn't just reluctant, he ran in the opposite direction (Jonah 1:3). Left to our own resources, we might not run physically like Jonah, but our hearts can be just as hard to the needs of those who aren't like us. Jonah resented God for sending him to strangers as an ambassador of welcome, peace, forgiveness, and repentance.

When we work with others whose methods are drastically different from ours or with those who actively oppose us, we are confronted, like Jonah, with our own selfishness and self-protection. But our new identity in Christ dismantles our fears and biases and gives us a heart to love others. In the New Testament Jesus tells us that the "sign" of Jonah (Luke 11:29-32) is repentance from hard-heartedness.

God often allows perceived competitors, enemies, and strangers to cross our paths so that we are confronted with our personal guardedness, self-righteousness, and judgment. God wants us, like the Good Samaritan, to choose hospitality rather than isolation. It is too easy to limit our close relationships to those who are like us, who unwittingly reinforce our perceptions of life and rarely challenge our assumptions. In Jonah's case, God sent sailors, a storm, and huge fish to deliver him from his hard-heartedness towards the Ninevites. Through his testing, Jonah came to know the true character of God as well as his inability to repent in his own strength.

In our work it can be easy to give in to temptations like the following rather than work toward mutual understanding and hospitality:

- In our weakness it is tempting to judge and slander our perceived competitors in a short-sighted way to win others over.
- In our self-righteousness we can treat frustrating coworkers harshly or treat peers with superiority and contempt.
- In our perceived powerlessness it can be easy to gossip about those we consider foolish, out of touch, or selfish in their decision making.

Just like Jonah we need the power and resources promised in the gospel to help us repent of our foolishness and rely completely on Christ's work. He is the only One with the power to give us significance and free us from seeking life and meaning outside the truth of the gospel.

- Instead of competing with others, feeling discouraged when we don't measure up and judgmental when we do, the Holy Spirit gives us the peace, confidence, and integrity to promote the accomplishments of others, even those of our competitors.
- Instead of being discouraged when our approval-seeking coworkers thrive (and internally glad when they fail), the Spirit gives us the power to cheer on their successes and mentor them quietly when they fail. Our security lies in Jesus, not our personal record.
- Instead of pursuing power through gossip and slander, the gospel frees us to see that our lives and careers are secure in the powerful hands of Jesus.

The truth of the gospel helps us remember that there are no circumstances we encounter that are not for our good or God's glory. His Spirit gives us the power to resist sin and pursue peace and blessing in every relationship and circumstance.

Our grasp of what Jesus's righteous record means has another effect on our being ambassadors in our work. If we are secure in our relationship with Jesus, we are free to spend time with those around us, regardless of their position, background, or beliefs. Rather than worry about what it will look like if we hang out with a certain subset of people in our workplace, the gospel opens us up to moving freely among different groups and personalities. Because we are confident of who we are in Christ, we no longer need to maneuver our relationships to get ahead or avoid people because of their reputation. We are free to care for strangers and outsiders because we understand what it is to be loved as a stranger—even while an enemy!

God's love displayed through Jesus compels us to love others well. The reality that God goes before us in all our relationships frees us to establish meaningful connections built on genuine love and care with coworkers. We don't see them as an evangelistic project—something that can be much more about us than them. It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict and transform hearts, not ours. Our calling is to pursue authentic relationships, to be available to love as we've been loved.

Part of being a true ambassador is to know and be known by those around us, just as we know and are known by God himself. We've been entrusted with time, talent, and resources to move towards others, not protect ourselves in fear. We relate authentically because we've been freed by Jesus to love as we are loved.

Being gospel-centered also changes the tenor and tone of our conversations. The gospel helps us understand what it is to be other-centered. If we are worried about what others think of our outlook on life or our personal record of sin, we can unwittingly build walls by what we say, instead of building a bridge toward greater understanding. Our main job as ambassadors is to be in relationships with those in whom God is already at work, seeking to discover what he is doing in

their hearts. So don't worry about your reputation or about letting others know where you or the Bible stand on a particular subject. If they want to know more, they will ask.

Instead of worrying about yourself, ask questions. Ambassadors care more about the needs of others rather than about being cared for themselves. Jesus has already done, and is doing, that for us! If we get to know others and love them well, they will respond when they see the ways they've been loved.

The power of the gospel is displayed when we welcome others who are outside of Christ. Our welcome communicates how much we enjoy them. Our words, nonverbal cues, and tone tell others clearly and quickly whether they are valued or merely tolerated. God's love is a welcoming love; it embraces the outsider, forgives the rebel, and is long-suffering and merciful to the prodigal. God's love is the kind of love we want to imitate and communicate. We imitate it because we know it personally, and we communicate it when it overflows from our lives. Our thoughts, actions, and words will always reflect where we place our hope and how God has impacted (or failed to impact) us.

When we welcome others, do we treat them as befits their eternal nature—with dignity, care, and grace as those made in the image of God? Treating people with honor and respect—the way we would want to be treated ourselves—is an intensely biblical practice based on our own knowledge of being created in the image of God. That should get noticed in a world bent on proving itself and getting all it can! It should encourage us that, even in our failures, God has us right where he wants us. As we serve him there, he is interceding for us (John 17:15).

A life in which repentance is normal and genuine allows us to be authentic with believer and unbeliever alike. If we can admit we're not perfect and demonstrate that we're approachable and non-defensive because God is helping us in our struggles, the gospel becomes so much more accessible to those who don't know him. Isn't it the essence of the good news that there is hope for sinners like us? Jesus goes before us, interceding and providing so that we can be Ambassadors who make the most of every opportunity to love others well.

## EXERCISE

### PEOPLE OF PEACE AND HOSPITALITY

Make a list of the people from your workplace who might have a hard time getting along with you or that have an ongoing conflict with you. Try to describe the problem from their point of view.

Now, make a second list of people you have a hard time getting along with in your workplace. Do you notice any envy, judgment, coldness, etc. in your attitude because of comparisons (of superiority or criticism) you have made about that person? How would you compare the two lists? List what you need to receive from Christ to let go of your sinful reactions and reach out to the other person.

How can you rely on Jesus as you become more of a person of peace and hospitality? As you repent of things on your second list, consider pursuing one or two of the people on that list with kindness, reconciliation, and relationship. Think about the gifts and interests you might have in common. Could you work on a project together or collaborate on a common goal? (Having said that, please know that some relationships need to be mended by someone else because of the depth of pain and hurt that exists. That's okay. God is capable of calling someone else into that relationship if he desires to see change in those cases. Every human need is not a call from God!)

# LESSON 9

## MESSENGERS: GOD EQUIPS US WITH THE GOSPEL

### BIG IDEA

God has entrusted us with our relationships. He has enlisted us as his *Messengers* in a mission to share the gospel with and make disciples of our children, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. In the past he used others to free us from our rebellion and to disciple us in the faith. Now he invites us to do the same in partnership with his Spirit. So, rather than being consumed by our personal agendas, the Spirit helps us to see that our lives are full of opportunities to share the good news with those who do not know Christ.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passages

Article: *A New Outlook on Neighbors*

Discussion: Process *A New Outlook on Neighbors* article

Exercise: *A Lifestyle of Love*

Wrap-Up: Final thoughts and prayer

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

Sometimes when we see ourselves as novices (as a student, starting out in a new job, etc.) we feel as if we have little to offer those with greater experience. The Bible sees such circumstances very differently. Paul's words to Timothy can be applied to anyone who is lower on the institutional totem pole: "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young" (1 Timothy 4:12 NIV). Youth and inexperience might change the approach you use, but we need to remember the calling God has given us. In Romans 15 Paul says that he is speaking boldly because of the grace given to him. Because of the grace given to us, we too can forget ourselves and speak confidently about the freedom and power for change found in Christ.

Which is a more powerful way to reach those around us: working through a formulaic presentation of truth while we appear to have it all together, or allowing people to see our honest struggles in disappointing circumstances and our efforts to apply the gospel to that situation?

How about the opposite end of the spectrum? What happens when there is a victory for the work team, a promotion, or another event that should lead to joy, but instead you feel hollow and empty? Do you hide these emotions and thoughts or do you use those struggles to let others see God working in your life? God can use anything to open doors for deeper conversations if we allow him.

We should be people who sow the seeds of the gospel wherever we go. God will show us what soil is fertile and where to go deeper. He is the One who hardens

and softens, nurtures, and sends sun and rain to allow growth. We serve as his partners and allow him to do his work. Best of all, we witness what he is doing and share in his joy when the lost are found.

## SET-UP

What does God ask of us as messengers of the gospel? First, we are to be a faithful presence that loves and serves. Who we are and what we do are critical components of our message. Part of this is being candid with people about what God is doing in us and how we see him at work in the world. We also do this by welcoming personal conversation and questions on our perspective. While many people we interact with may not go to church (and may never do so), they can listen to us and have deeper spiritual conversations with us. When they see our openness to what God is doing in our lives, they will grow to trust us professionally, relationally, and spiritually as God works in their hearts and minds.

In our Bible Conversation and Article, we'll look at how spiritual conversations can naturally flow from what we do every day, based on the ups and downs of life in community with believers and unbelievers.

READ: 1 Peter 3:13-18

**LEADER'S NOTE:** If our behavior is in alignment with our message, our integrity will eventually be one of the things that attracts the interests of others. If we present the gospel gently and graciously, we avoid being a stumbling block to others. The power of the gospel lies not in our persuasion but in the reality of the gospel itself.

ASK: How does Peter link the “reason for the hope that is in you” to the way the gospel changes us?

ASK: What attitudes and actions does Peter say we should have as we “give a reason for the hope” that we have? Think about who initiates the conversation here.

**LEADER'S NOTE:** In the model Peter presents, our actions help initiate conversation. Especially in the workplace, the inquirer should be attracted to the different way we carry ourselves and the different perspective from those around us. Hopefully we seem at odds with the ways of the world in our hopefulness, gentleness, and respect.

ASK: Why is it hard to accept being slandered and treated unfairly “for the reason” we give? Why does Peter say, “Have no fear of them”?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** Being demeaned or rejected by others is difficult, especially if we believe that our standing in man's eyes is more important than glorifying God. We may make mistakes in how and when we present the gospel, but ultimately it is the gospel that people will accept or reject if we get out of the way and let God speak through us. If we present our hope in Christ, others can ask deeper questions and respond to what God is doing in their lives. We don't have to push them to become converts.

ASK: Why is it "better to suffer for doing good . . . than for doing evil"?

**LEADER'S NOTE:** The prior three questions revolve around the idea that God sees and knows our circumstances. We are to let him judge those who treat us with evil intent and trust that he oversees all of life. Just as Jesus suffered evil and took the sins of his enemies upon himself, we trust that he can do the same thing with our enemies, so that we can return good for evil.

The next passage shows how sharing our faith is a Spirit-empowered process of sowing, watering, growing, and harvesting the gospel. As its messengers God calls us to work in parallel with his Spirit. Because of this we need to be ready to share how the good news is good for us each day.

READ: 1 Corinthians 3:6-11

**LEADER'S NOTE:** The main thrust of this passage is that every part of our work, including the results, are all from God. The purpose in all we do should be to bring glory to God. If we remember that it is God who gives us opportunities to share our faith and he is responsible for the results, we are freed up to be faithful to the opportunities he gives us, whatever they may be.

ASK: What does Paul mean by "he who plants and he who waters are one"?

ASK: How does God give the growth in verses 6 and 7?

ASK: How is Jesus always the foundation of our work? How is this especially true when sharing the message of hope we have?

**TRANSITION TO ARTICLE:** Evangelism has gotten a bad rap, in part because it has often been carelessly and insensitively done. Part of the problem is a one-size-fits-all approach to witnessing that is awkward for everybody; you and everyone else

want to avoid it for good reason. But evangelism didn't always have this problem or reputation. Before mass market approaches were applied to everything, including religion, we looked at evangelism and discipleship individually and relationally. If you end up treating people like projects or trophies, they will see through your efforts and either reject you or call you to love more authentically.

How can we learn from the past and move toward a different future in the way we communicate the gospel? We need to think of ways to welcome others authentically, to relate to people personally, and to explain God's big story creatively. Hopefully, *A New Outlook on Neighbors* can help you move beyond fear and shame to find joy and freedom in relating to unbelievers. It's possible, if we allow God to help us embody the welcome and peace that flow from the gospel.

## ARTICLE

Turn to *A New Outlook on Neighbors* and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

## DISCUSSION

ASK: What failures have you experienced—on the receiving end or giving end—in past attempts to share your faith?

ASK: Why might an approach that emphasizes, “Except for the hope of the gospel, we are not much different from those without Christ,” be effective?

ASK: Can you tell a personal story about your relationship with Jesus and the value of that relationship today?

ASK: Is there someone God is asking you to pursue relationally this week?

## EXERCISE

Use the exercise *A Lifestyle of Love* to consider your relationships and how you might sow, water, or harvest in partnership with God's work.

TURN TO: *A Lifestyle of Love*. Review with the group if there is time, or assign for homework.

## WRAP-UP

Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

# A NEW OUTLOOK ON NEIGHBORS

Sharing our faith doesn't have to be offensive to be effective. No one wants to be *that guy!* When we tell others about the impact of the good news on our lives, we're reminded that, just like us, other people want to be loved authentically, listened to, and respected for their point of view. We can do that! We've seen that God has placed us where we are to be his image-bearers, imitators, bond-servants, stewards, and ambassadors. As we interact with others and plant the seeds of the gospel, the Spirit does the work of transformation. We just need to be a faithful presence that points to his work and simply tells our story of faith when others ask about the reason for the hope we have.

Step into the hall or aisle at work and notice the people around you. Whom do you know? How can you get to know them better? Take it all in. Give thanks for this place, including the pleasures, the pains, the friends, and even those who call you their enemy. Jesus has sent you as a gospel messenger into your workplace "neighborhood" so that he can give sight to the blind and freedom to captives and lift judgment for the condemned. Does that feel like good news to you? Does it bring you joy or do you feel guilty for not doing more? Your workplace relationships are entrusted to you by God. Enjoy them! When we lose ourselves in thanks for God's purposes, we find a deep contentment that comes from his Spirit. Getting lost in the grand cause of God, we're finally able to forget ourselves and live.

Whether you are a stay-at-home mom, student, contractor, or office worker, it's no accident that God has placed you near your coworkers. Their proximity is a great relationship builder. When my family moved to our current neighborhood, we purposely purchased a home on a corner lot with a detached garage. We wanted more sidewalk so we could meet and greet neighbors. We tore down the privacy fence and built a deck close to the street. We put a workshop in the garage, where people could see us working on projects that became conversation starters. In my previous job I took an office where coworkers could easily drop by in the course of the day. I chose to work at a round, more collaborative conference table rather than a desk.

Modern life is often described as crowded loneliness, where we move from dehumanizing work environments to cocooned home environments. I wanted to offer a different model, an environment built on trust-building and face-to-face conversation. You might have an attached garage or live in an apartment building—that's not the point here. Thinking of creative ways to pursue hospitality (1 Timothy 3:2) and establish personal connections is part of what it means to love others for Christ's sake.

We need to think about how and when to present the gospel, especially in today's workplace, which (rightly) frowns on proselytizing "on the clock." We need to use our lunch hours, after-work hours and home life to share life with coworkers. Remember, we are not called to bring people to Jesus so much as we are to bring Jesus to people through authentic lives and a welcoming attitude built on how Christ welcomes and accepts us. We're told to be ready to give a word when asked to do so (1 Peter 3:14-18). If we are in relationship with those around us but doing life differently, people *will* ask! Saint Francis said, "Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words." It isn't merely our words that have power; it is the gospel at work under our words that makes them powerful and effective when we have opportunity to use them.

You may have pretty good reasons for hesitating about using words. Many of us have stumbled through or listened to gospel presentations that were impersonal, careless, self-righteous, dehumanizing, sometimes burden-inducing rather than burden-lifting. It doesn't have to be that way if your life is a reflection of Christ's life and a signpost for the gospel. When people are welcomed and they compare how you treat them to the way unbelievers treat them, they will see the difference Jesus has made in your life. They will want it for themselves and say, "Tell me more!"

True, our actions may not always be interpreted correctly. Sometimes people might react negatively for reasons of their own. Others might say, "Wow, you are a fantastic guy!" and you might need to respond, "Well, actually I'm not. I just have a great Savior." At those moments, when the Spirit is at work, our words need to be purposeful and direct. We need to use clear and simple language and stories that others understand.

I grew up reading books on apologetics, but after sharing the gospel with others over the last twenty years, I now think that few people come to faith through rational arguments alone. Their questions demand answers, but they come to faith when God reaches their hearts as well. Much of the current generation is skeptical of organized religion and antagonistic toward God. For them, reason alone is not enough. Truth also needs to pass the "smell" test, where people see if your way of life matches up to their life experience. This is where our lives make a critical difference. Spiritual decisions are usually not made quickly but over time, in relationship. This makes relationships vital but tricky, since the current generation is hungry for face-to-face relationship, but because of technology, is isolated, ill-equipped, and fearful to engage in authentic connections.

To relate well to those around us, we need to free ourselves of religious jargon. Good friends over the past ten years have helped me get rid of "insider" language to explain how I relate to God ("sharing your faith," "giving my testimony," "got saved," "sanctification, justification," etc.). If you're like me, you've probably spent a lot of time inside Christian circles. It might take a lot of work to relate to people outside of them. Think about telling your story in a new way. Are you authentic? Is

life all roses? How well does your story match your current life circumstance? How is God freeing you from a bent toward serving yourself today? How is the good news good for *you* today? Can you communicate with others without using a lot of theological terms that are only understood in a church subculture?

Second, when you show up, ask good questions. If you want to care for people, don't wait for an invite; go and build relationships. Invite others into your world so they see how faith is a real alternative to the crazy ways the world lives. When people recognize that you care, they will respond positively. If they sense they are your project, they won't stick around long. Visit a coworker when he is in the hospital, bring a meal, or offer to drive a neighbor's kids home from school. Love others in simple, practical ways, and build relationships that are truly concerned about their lives. The Spirit-prompted conversations will follow when they are ready.

Third, after establishing relationships, be creative in getting to know your coworkers better. Hobbies, shared projects, community initiatives, meals, celebrations, even shared vacations are ways to spend time with them. I am a big fan of multi-tasking; getting to know someone doesn't need to take a lot of extra time. When you are performing tasks, going to meals, or getting a job done, do it with someone else. Ask your peers for their perspective on subjects—and listen. Let them at some point *ask* you for yours. Instead of doing the church-based youth program with your son or daughter, consider joining one at the YMCA or YWCA, Boy and Girl Scouts, etc. Throw your lot in with unbelievers and be a witness to what God wants to do (and is doing) in your workplace. Some of the best conversations I've had with unbelievers occurred when I wasn't looking for them, when others asked me for my take on the meaning, purpose, and direction of life.

Shared life circumstances are great for interacting about age and stage issues as well. Have coworkers over. Throw a party for your work team at the end of a significant project. Never go to lunch alone. Carpool. Hang out with a coworker or client on a business trip. Affirm someone in your workplace for his hard but necessary work.

Finally, pray that God would show you what he is doing, how he is going before you and spiritually pacing your relationships. Pray that he would show you the right time to start a relationship, enter into a conversation, push for more depth beyond surface interaction, and the time to encourage a decision to follow Christ. He has placed you where you are to let the message of the gospel impact your relationships with believers and unbelievers—and he is overseeing those relationships for your good and his glory.

## EXERCISE

### A LIFESTYLE OF LOVE

Think about the people you encounter at work in a typical day or week. Make a list of them now. Next, ask God to show you ways you can be more purposeful in connecting with those people. Write those down. Ask God to show you how he wants you to sow, water, or harvest in your words and actions. Think of “sow, water, and harvest” as First, Second and Third Steps like these:

**First Steps:** Getting to know the person to understand who he or she is.

**Second Steps:** Sharing more about yourself and your life in honest, transparent ways.

**Third Steps:** Introducing or following up on spiritual topics in a conversational, non-threatening way.

Remember, it is God’s Spirit who reaches a person’s heart and enables him or her to see his or her need and to trust in Christ.

Let’s work through a couple of examples.

| <u>Name</u>                | <u>First, Second, Third Steps</u> | <u>Content of Conversation</u>          |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Jeanine, Coworker       | First                             | Go to lunch for birthday celebration    |
| 2. Joe, Custodian          | Second                            | Follow up on conversation about parents |
| 3. Sal, Customer           | Second                            | Ask about movie with spiritual themes   |
| 4. Joan, Divorced teammate | Third                             | Inquire about last week’s sadness       |

Try it with people you know from your workplace.

|    | <u>Name</u> | <u>First, Second, Third Steps</u> | <u>Content of Conversation</u> |
|----|-------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. |             |                                   |                                |
| 2. |             |                                   |                                |
| 3. |             |                                   |                                |
| 4. |             |                                   |                                |
| 5. |             |                                   |                                |

# LESSON 10

## EVERYDAY SABBATH: RESTING FOR WORK AND LEISURE

### BIG IDEA

Work and leisure are good gifts from God, but they can become idols that pull us from him. In this lesson, we'll look at how a gospel-centered pursuit of rest brings work and leisure back under the authority of God. If we aren't regularly setting aside time for God and his people, our free time can be eaten up in purposeless entertainment and recreation, where we amuse ourselves in self-indulgence. The gospel turns us from self-centered uses of both work and leisure to embrace a genuine *Sabbath* rest.

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Bible Conversation: Read and talk about the passages

Article: ***Spiritual Rest: How the Gospel Helps Us Unplug***

Discussion: Process ***Spiritual Rest***

Exercise: ***Bringing Sabbath Rest into Every Day of the Week***

Wrap-Up: Final thoughts and prayer

### BIBLE CONVERSATION

There are two main ways we fail to embrace Sabbath rest. First, we allow everyday preoccupations with work and leisure to crowd out our relationship with God and times of celebration with his people. Regular practices like repenting and trusting daily and pursuing Sabbath rest are used by the Spirit to reorient our lives around our need for God and his love for us. Otherwise we may live unexamined, boundaryless lives and find ourselves working endlessly for goals that other forces dictate. Or, if we *are* able to slow down, the overwhelming pressures of school, home, or workplace can drive us emotionally toward fear and spiritual distraction. Second, just as we often separate spirituality from our workweek, we can also see weekends and holidays merely as times for hobbies, sports, and entertainment. We can be consumed with play, pursuing a rest that always feels just out of reach, instead of enjoying each day in the presence and worship of God. Our society defines leisure negatively as time spent away from work. But without God, it is a counterfeit rest that can breed dissatisfaction and restlessness.

In the workplace the weekend can be synonymous with "on your own time," which implies that you are owned and controlled by others the rest of the time. And because technology allows us to be continually connected, many never truly vacate their callings, even for leisure. We schedule vacations and travel so tightly that many return to work exhausted, ready for the rest and refreshment of a predictable schedule. Our time is all mixed in and all mixed up.

## SET-UP

Leisure, like work, is not a bad thing, but unmoored from faith, it can fill us with unrest. Leisure apart from God and his people might be a diversion from work, but it cannot provide any spiritually valuable effect. We don't need a work ethic as much as we need a better Sabbath rest ethic.

A gospel-centered approach to Sabbath rest reorders and redefines both work and leisure. It is built upon the coming reality of Jesus's future Sabbath rest, when all creation will be made new to live a life with God in his reordered kingdom. The gospel helps us approach Sabbath rest in ways not possible in the pursuit of work or leisure alone. It reminds us of who God is and who he has made us to be so that we can embrace his purposes in all we do, rather than pursue personal schemes and selfish idolatries.

The two passages we'll consider reveal what a huge gift God gave a fallen humanity in the practice of a one-in-seven-day Sabbath. First we'll look to some of the finer details of God resting on the seventh day of creation (Genesis 2:1-3). Then we'll look to the New Testament and some of the ways that Jesus completes and fulfills the Sabbath rest of creation.

READ: Genesis 2:1-3

ASK: What do you think it means that God's work was finished on the seventh day?

**LEADERS NOTE:** God's work of creation was full, or fulfilled on that day. There was more providential and redemptive work to come. But as Genesis 2:3 says the work of creation was complete and worthy of God setting it apart and making it Holy by his rest.

ASK: What does it mean that God would rest from work? Does he stop being God? What is he doing here and why?

ASK: How do you think God's work "in creation" was made holy by his rest?

ASK: Exodus 20:8-11 points back to this moment in Genesis 2 to tell Israel to imitate God in a pattern of rest. How might imitating God in his rest help us?

**LEADERS NOTE:** Somehow God's rest is actually sanctifying or setting apart the creation, and his rest represents the real fulfillment or completion of the "worth" of the work itself. Somehow for us as re-creators there is also value in giving work the weight and value it deserves. All this is done and empowered by God's underlying activity that undergirds what we do to make it happen and our particular giftedness to re-create or transform his work in light of creation, providence and redemption.

Now let's look at Hebrews 4 where we see a glimpse of Jesus's future work and rest.

READ: Hebrews 4:8-16

ASK: What do you think it means when it says that there is another day of rest coming "later on" and that the way to enter this future rest is to rest from our works, just as God did?

ASK: How does this passage say that we should enter this coming rest?

LEADERS NOTE: The passage says ironically that (1) we should strive to rest, and (2) we should hold fast to our confession. This second image should conjure up the picture of Israel holding fast to God as their only hope that we saw back in Lesson 5. Jesus's life, death, and resurrection *is* our only hope for real rest. He achieves for us what we cannot achieve for ourselves.

He has perfectly obeyed the law, taken our sins upon himself, and given us his righteous record. What we need to move toward is a deep rest in him, instead of running from him. Our work is one of repentance where we let him lift off our sin and put on us his righteous record, rather than foolishly clinging to our own record. His burden is easy and his yoke is light. If we let him do the work, we will find that his work is no work for us at all, only joy.

ASK: How does this rest of Jesus parallel God's rest in Genesis 2?

LEADERS NOTE: God/Jesus goes before us in it. Jesus is sanctifying and completing his work (us) by entering into his rest, and taking his rightful place as Messiah and king.

ASK: What are some implications of this kind of rest for us?

TRANSITION TO ARTICLE: We are now going to think more about the ways that rest, work, and leisure interact with each other by reading and discussing ***Spiritual Rest: How the Gospel Helps Us Unplug.***

## ARTICLE

Turn to the article ***Spiritual Rest: How the Gospel Helps Us Unplug*** and read it aloud, taking turns at paragraph breaks.

## DISCUSSION

ASK: Can you relate to any of the activities mentioned at the beginning of the article (i.e. being constantly plugged in, constantly busy, never resting)? Which bullet point best describes your life?

ASK: What do you need rest from? How do you think coming to Jesus in faith and repentance might bring rest from what you are working at?

ASK: What are some ways you might live out your Sabbath rest every day?

ASK: Have you ever thought about taking one day of the week to rest in order to focus on your relationship with God? What would be hard about that? What might be good about it?

## EXERCISE

We've been thinking about Sabbath rest. Use the exercise ***Bringing Sabbath Rest into Every Day of the Week*** to help you assess how you view the Sabbath and how you might view it differently.

TURN TO: ***Bringing Sabbath Rest into Every Day of the Week***. Review with the group if there is time or assign for homework.

## WRAP-UP

Take questions, comments, and lead group in prayer.

## ARTICLE

### SPIRITUAL REST: HOW THE GOSPEL HELPS US UNPLUG

How rested are you? Many of us spend our time running from one activity to another without ever experiencing true rest for our souls. Work, leisure, activities with our kids, and constant communication with people add up to a frenetic lifestyle. We just can't seem to unplug.

Perhaps rest seems out of reach for you. But Jesus does promise us rest. He says to us, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). This gospel-powered rest comes from the sure knowledge that our sins are forgiven, that Jesus has done the work of salvation for us, that we can stop our striving for perfection, meaning, being right, and getting ahead, and instead turn to Jesus and trust him for all these things. True Sabbath rest flows from our relationship with Christ. He is our rest and peace.

It's easy for us to lose focus on our relationship with Christ as we go through our week. When that happens, we see some of the following things take over our lives:

- Our work becomes our identity instead of being God's dearly loved child.
- We can't stop working because "It's all up to us." We don't remember that our heavenly Father is our true provider.
- Even when we set aside time to rest, we can't stop doing. Our minds never stop thinking, planning, etc.
- We would rather do almost anything (send e-mails, text, talk on the phone, watch TV or sports, shop, etc.) than spend time with Jesus.
- Gathering to celebrate with God's people on Sundays becomes just one more option on a long list.

All of this reflects how well we know Jesus and how thoroughly his love has taken over our hearts and lives. To know that God is for us, that he loves and cares for us enough to take our death and give us his life, leads us to true spiritual rest. But without a grasp of the gospel, what we do during leisure times and Sundays will be, at best, just a temporary diversion from work.

**Spiritual rest is completely different from work and leisure.** Knowing Jesus and his rest transforms both our work and our leisure. When we encounter Jesus, it leads to a repentance and renewal that helps us become God-centered and other centered in both our work *and* leisure. When pursued regularly as a way to connect to God and neighbor, spiritual rest can reshape all our other activities to reflect the truths of the gospel. For those who pursue work and leisure without God, there is no true rest. But for those who seek God as the source of spiritual rest, every day can be a day of rest.

**Spiritual Rest is modeled and empowered by Jesus.** In the Gospels, Jesus takes time for both work and leisure. He feeds the five thousand, parties with tax collectors, yet also takes time to rest, pray, and be with his disciples—a time that is neither work nor leisure (Luke 4:42; 5:16; 6:12; 9:28; Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; 14:32-34). In those times he relates to his heavenly Father and shows his disciples the power of being in God's presence. He is God, yet as a man he meets with his Father to give us a model and example. He refuses to let work or leisure dictate his choices, and when those forces overwhelm his disciples, he models a deliberate retreat to counteract their power. When we pursue spiritual rest, we position ourselves to drink deeply of grace, even in the midst of busy lives. Spiritual rest happens when we stop relying on our own efforts and depend fully on Jesus (Hebrews 4). In so doing, our work is aligned to his work, and he is able to work through us.

**Pursuing spiritual rest reminds us that we have a good Father.** When we center our lives on *our* work and *our* leisure, we are easily confused by what we think we have earned for ourselves and what God has given us. When we let ourselves be pursued by Jesus, work and leisure lose their power to shape us. When we pursue spiritual rest, we realize that we bring nothing to God yet we can expect everything from him. We have nothing to offer that we have not been given; we offer ourselves only as broken vessels for God to use. When Jesus removed himself from daily life, he taught his disciples to pray to his heavenly Father. He taught them to pray for and give thanks for simple things like daily bread, to ask for forgiveness and to forgive others. He showed his disciples how to be vigilant against temptations in the worlds of work and leisure, and how to pursue God's kingdom as the alternative to their seductive power (Matthew 6:5-15). This is a lifestyle of every day rest in God's provision, love, and care. It's an each-and-everyday lifestyle of turning from our own pursuits and placing ourselves under God's care and protection.

**A weekly Sabbath changes our perspective on work and leisure.** Several years ago I began to radically unplug myself from my daily patterns for one day in seven. This is a hard task and I fail much more than I succeed, but it is an important practice nonetheless. Here's how I have decided to implement this in my life: I worship with God's people; I try to avoid both work and entertainment-oriented leisure in order to rest; I pursue relationship with God; and I spend time with people who love God. You may have other ways of pursuing a Sabbath rest one day a week.

Think about some additional ways you can actively pursue and enter into rest communally with other believers or your family.

By setting one day a week aside to focus on my relationship with God and others, I'm better able to reflect on the week that has passed and dedicate the week ahead to God. I'm better able to spend time in the Word and prayer, to remind myself of

the gospel and repent where I need to. Even when imperfectly pursued, this practice has renewed me. When I set aside time during a particularly difficult day or week, in the midst of overwhelming demands placed on me by myself or others, it is easier to see how those demands are transformed by the pursuit of God's kingdom. When I am tugged to plug back in—out of fear that I won't measure up or achieve some goal—I can see more clearly the false, idolatrous expectations of work and leisure. Even in my failure God is at work, and I can more easily repent of those failures the next time they intrude on God's priorities because I see them more clearly. A similar thing happens when I take time for a deliberate yearly vacation from work, attend a conference or retreat, or spend time with family to allow God to clarify my priorities.

**A rhythm of spiritual rest transforms our outlook on life.** Even though we set aside one day a week for worship and rest, every day has the potential to be a Sabbath to the Lord. Spiritual rest in all its forms (daily, weekly, seasonal, and annual) helps us return to our work with a renewed perspective on “the daily grind” as something more—an act of worship in Jesus’s presence. When Jesus declared that he was Lord of the Sabbath, he was acknowledging that he was doing his Father’s work. He created and re-created, healed and celebrated, to bring sinners into the rest and worship of God (Matthew 12:1-16). Sabbath is more than the absence of work; it is a reliance on God to give up our own agendas and enter into the work he has set before us, and to do it in his strength rather than our own (John 5:19). In one sense, we have nothing to do but receive each day’s work as a gift from him. As we receive that work as a gift from him, we are sent out into mission, and he goes before us and with us. God longs to work in us and through us, if we would only be strong enough to be weak and let him (Philippians 2:13)! Worship helps us to live our lives by faith in Jesus, who loves us and gave himself up for us (Galatians 2:20).

We don’t observe spiritual rest to prove that we are God’s redeemed people. We pursue spiritual rest *because* we are God’s beloved children. When we celebrate being in his presence, we are reminded of our participation in his work to reclaim the world for him. Jesus’s finished work is the truest place of rest for us as believers. The Sabbath celebrates the security of our relationship with God, God’s future final victory over sin and death, and his sure return. Our personal priorities in work and our “need” for leisure are diminished when we see how our fears dominate our appetites and attention at God’s expense. And when we repent of our fears, Jesus is better able to work in us and through us.

So the secret to true spiritual rest is to stop depending on our own actions and to depend instead on Jesus. When we connect with him, give up our striving, and take on his work, we’re able to pursue real rest. As we experience his presence, we will come to know true Sabbath rest throughout our lives. Burdens are lifted and idols dethroned when we let the Spirit displace the things that have tried to rule us, and we plead instead for Jesus to fill us and work through us.

## EXERCISE

### BRINGING SABBATH REST INTO EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK

**The patterns of the fall have become embedded in work and leisure.**

These forces want us to be shaped into their image rather than the image of God.

ASK: What are some things that distract you when you pursue spiritual rest?  
(*checking e-mail or social media posts, turning on a ball game, housecleaning, etc.*)

ASK: What might lie underneath those patterns? Why do you allow them to distract? (*What, at the heart level, keeps you choosing other things over Jesus when actively pursuing spiritual rest?*)

**Now consider what false beliefs (about God and you) are beneath your actions.** ASK: What falsehoods about God's care for you and the identity he has given you reinforce the choices and patterns that keep you from spiritual rest?

ASK: What truths of the gospel do you need to believe instead?

For example, someone might say, "I have a really hard time not compulsively checking my e-mail at night and on Sundays. My coworkers all do it and expect me to do the same, so I don't want to be the 'slacker' on the team. So, in a very real sense, 'who others say I am' (a slacker, someone who isn't dedicated, someone who might someday be 'off' the team) matters more to me than who God says I am. It also makes me feel important—like they just can't get things done without me."

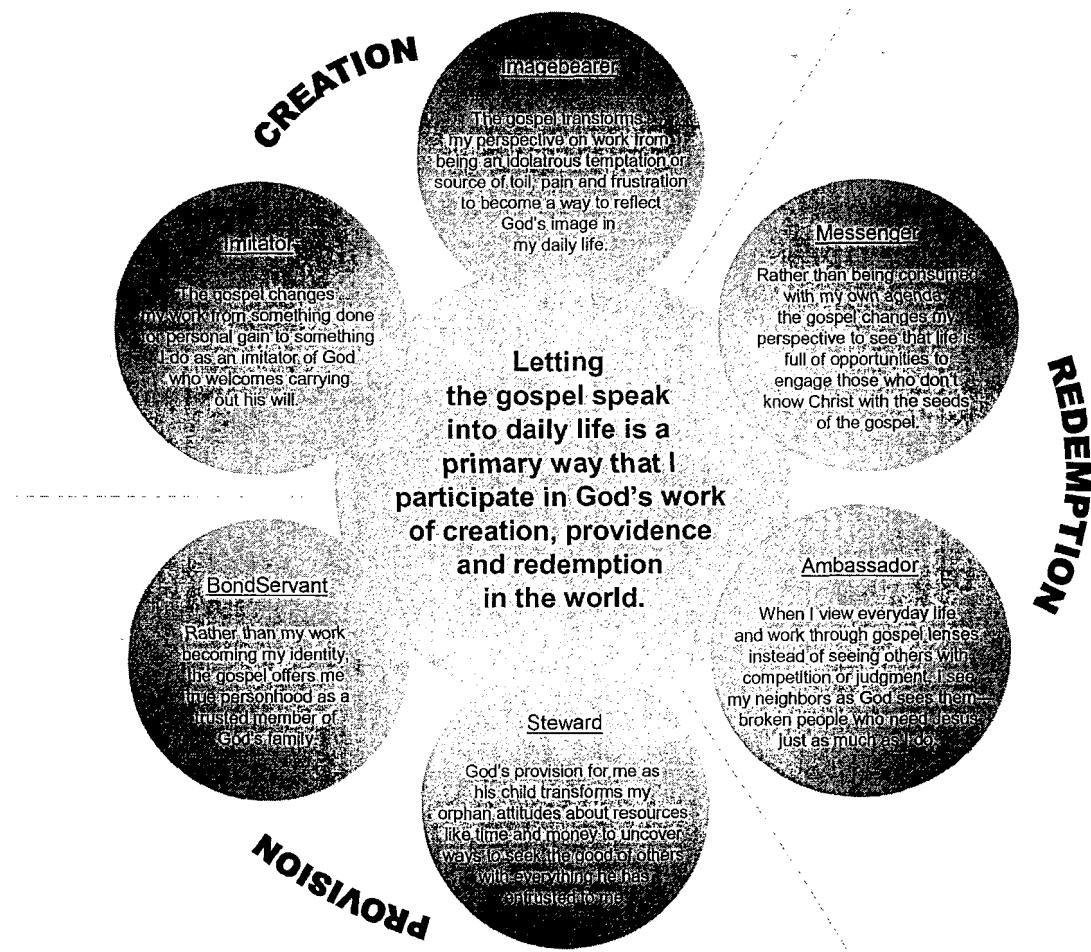
In contrast, God says I matter not because of what I do, but because of what Jesus has already done. God is my fortress and my protector. He delivers me from the

idolatry of success or acceptance (Psalm 31). Jesus establishes my “rightness” before God (Philippians 3:8-10), not my accomplishments or achievements.

“When I really believe that, it empowers me to trust God and ‘put down’ my work to deliberately rest in him as my Spiritual Rest. Those promises also remind me that it’s okay to tell my coworkers that I don’t read e-mail so that I can focus on my spiritual life and value my family. If it’s truly urgent, they should call me and I’ll get back to them as soon as I can. A byproduct is that I am able to return to work rested and refreshed for the work ahead.”

**Spiritual Rest encourages enjoyment of God, others, and God’s creation.**

ASK: If you could really unplug and enjoy the Sabbath rest the article describes, what activity(ies) could you pursue to celebrate God, people, and creation instead of the ways you’re tempted to pursue work or leisure apart from God?



## APPENDIX D: Known Uses and Endorsements

### Men's Group

Grace Bible Church, Nacogdoches Texas. Website has simplified Study Guide.

### Pinterest / Blogger

Pinned by Noelle Morrison, from Charlotte North Carolina

Under category - Recommended Study Guides.

<http://becomingmorr.blogspot.com/>

### Book Review

<http://christianbooknotes.com/2014/gospel-centered-life-at-work-by-robert-alexander/>

These ten lessons offer a paradigm shift for every person who claims to be a Christian. In our compartmentalized world, Robert offers us a biblical reason for living out our faith each and every day in the work place. Often, we bring the work place home with us whether good or bad. This resource will help us to bring our church service so to speak with us to work. Through reading and studying this resource, the reader will be challenged with his or her sinfulness and consequent need for the gospel in their life every day. The leader's guide takes minimal preparation except reading the chapter while the participant's guide does not demand a ton of work beforehand. In other words, this is a ready-made study resource that will challenge the Christian to live life in light of the gospel. While there may not be much "work" to be done as we think of Bible studies, I can honestly say that the lasting impact will be more than profound.

### Sermon Series – SOMA San Ramon Valley

A six week sermon series with corresponding Small Group Study Guides available at [www.somasrv.org](http://www.somasrv.org)

### Saturday Night Mixed Bible Study - Grace Community Church – Mills River, NC

1-21-2015 to 3-25-2015 [www.graceinfo.org](http://www.graceinfo.org)

### Women's Group – Redeemer San Diego

First Saturdays from 02/07/2015 to 03/07/2015, 9:00 AM - 10:30 AM

The Faith and Work Women's group meets monthly. Each meeting will be a separate discussion so that if you can't make it one month, you will still be able to attend another month and have a full conversation around the topic for that meeting. This group is a place to come and be real about the challenges and joys of being women of faith working in the world. The discussions will be based on several resources, including Tim Keller's book, Every Good Endeavor, and a series called, The Gospel-Centered Life at Work, as well as current events in our world that affect our work lives.

### Women's Group – Seattle Washington, Refresh Small Group

Small Group for Women on Wednesday evenings, January 7-March 25, 2015. Does God care about your work? Can you really bring your faith into your work? Does God use your work to shape your faith? What are your main motivators at work? Join Refresh and participate in an exploration of these and more thought-provoking issues as you build a bridge from your personal faith to your work. Be refreshed as you see how Jesus' work for you transforms the difficulties and drudgery of the daily grind. Triathlete and Boeing engineer, Deb O'Connell, will lead this discussion of the Gospel-Centered Life at Work. Contact is Sharon Carter at 253-859-8998.

### Sunday School Class – Christ Church Greensboro

8 Week Class on Faith and Work. 1<sup>st</sup> 3 chapters condensed for 1<sup>st</sup> Class.

### Men's Group – Friendly Hills Presbyterian Church, Jamestown, North Carolina

10 Week Bible Study.

### Men's Group – Christ Presbyterian Church, Edina Minnesota.

THURSDAY MORNING GROUP, Thursdays from 7:00-8:00AM in Room 108  
Deepen your faith in this men's group led by James Madsen as we study The  
Gospel-Centered Life at Work. New members welcome. Contact: James Madsen at  
952.920.8515 x308.

### Men's Group - New City Church, Indianapolis Indiana.

New City Men: Join us for our winter Band of Brothers meetings. Band of Brothers is a monthly meeting in which we are led through discussion and interaction about issues as they pertain especially to men. This winter, we are exploring "The Gospel Centered Life at Work." Workbooks are available for \$5.00. Saturday, February 7 at 8:30 AM (5809 East Washington Street, 46219).

### Book endorsement blurbs from faith and work practitioners:

*One of the Church's great lapses in judgment has been the neglect or disregard of work's importance to spiritual formation. Rob Alexander's experience in business and church leadership gives him a unique ability to address this hole in discipleship and help men and women discover the transforming power of the gospel in their lives and daily work.*

**Bill Peel**, Co-author of Workplace Grace,  
Executive Director Center for Faith & Work at LeTourneau University

*Alexander rightly redefines our understanding of work as a meaningful vocation in partnership with God, which God uses to advance his kingdom and to make us more like himself. Churches nurtured on this engaging and insightful study, and its gospel-centered principles, will become agents of God's love and redemption in places and in ways they never thought possible.*

**Dr. Catherine L. McDowell**, Assistant Professor of Old Testament  
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte.

*Rob has done an excellent job of releasing the power of the Gospel in our everyday work life. Whether you are a lifelong Christian or new to the faith, this book is a must read. As the owner of a pharmacy, this study guide has reshaped me as an employer, health care provider, husband and father to try to become Christ's ambassador in all that I do.*

**Dave Marley, Pharm.D.**  
CEO Marley Drug, Inc.

*This is an incredibly important guide. I know of no other book that so fully incorporates the meaning of the Gospel and of our work and what it means for my life as a Christ follower in the marketplace. It is equal parts illuminating, practical, inspiring and encouraging. In the truest sense of the word rich, I am a richer man for having read it. I will recommend it to all that I come across.*

**Henry R. Kaestner, Managing Principal, Sovereign's Capital.**  
Co-Founder and Chairman, Bandwidth.com

*Following in the footsteps of The Gospel-Centered Life, Rob Alexander has written a wonderful small group study on work, which is highly applicable regardless of whether our work happens in the office, on the road, at school, or in our home. Using clear examples, accessible language, and important Biblical lessons, Alexander forcefully illustrates the ways that God can use our work to shape us as Christians, while also using us to shape our workplace.*

**Dr. Christian B. Miller, Director of the Character Project and Professor of Philosophy, Wake Forest University**

*Too many Christians see their daily work as something separate from their faith, except for their opportunity to share faith. Rob Alexander, in his thoughtful and challenging book The Gospel-Centered Life at Work, helps us see that our work is important to God. Even in the tough times at work, God is a work in and through us. This is an important contribution to the life of any Christian.*

**Al Erisman, Executive in Residence, School of Business and Economics, Seattle Pacific University. Co-Chair, Theology of Work Project**  
([www.theologyofwork.org](http://www.theologyofwork.org))

*Here is a timely and thoughtful study of work as a sacred calling. Rob Alexander has put together a deeply provocative and unfailingly practical guide for the Christian community to think anew about the meaning of discipleship in the workplace. There is so much to ponder in these pages!*

**Dr. Van Weigel, Professor of Ethics and Economic Development, Eastern University, St. Davids, Pa.**

*God's purpose involves us at being at work in this world – a vocation, a calling. Rob Alexander says "work is one of the primary ways we respond to God in gratitude for all He has done in Christ." He includes exercises and excellent discussion questions to help Christians in the working world.*

**Will Metzger, Campus Minister University of Delaware. Author, Tell the Truth.**

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## VITA

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